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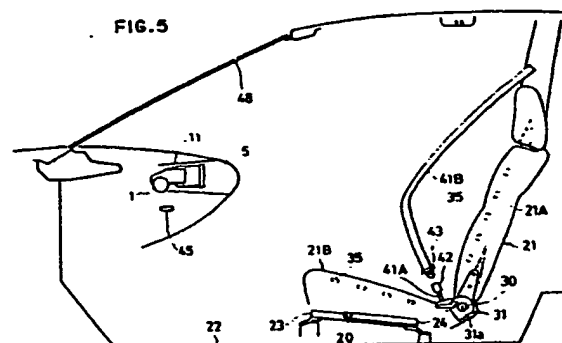
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⑳ Air bag system for automobile.

㉔ Air bag system for an automobile comprising collision detector means for detecting a collision of the automobile, inflator for generating a gas under pressure based on an output of said collision detector, air bag device (5) mounted on a front body member (1) located in front of a seat (21) for receiving the gas from the gas generator to take a pre-determined inflated configuration, seating condition sensor (20, 30, 35) for detecting a seating condition of a passenger seated on the seat, such as a seat position, reclining angle, passenger's size, posture, control unit for controlling an operation of the air bag device in accordance with the seating condition of the passenger so that the air bag inflated is brought into an optimal contact with the passenger.



EP 0 357 225 A1

AIR BAG SYSTEM FOR AUTOMOBILE

The present invention relates to an air bag system for an automobile, more specifically to a control for the air bag system.

Conventionally, there has been known an automobile equipped with an air bag system for preventing a passenger from being injured in case of a collision. Japanese Patent Publication No. 52-5128 discloses an air bag system in which an air bag for absorbing a shock of the collision is inflated by means of an inflator actuated electrically in the case of a collision so as to contact with a passenger's breast. As a result, a crash energy caused by the collision is absorbed by the inflated air bag so that the passenger is prevented from a shock of the collision and therefore kept safe.

U.S. Patent No. 3,911,391 discloses an air bag system in which a vehicle speed is sensed by a sensor and an operation of the air bag system is controlled in accordance with the vehicle speed sensed.

U.S. Patent No. 3,851,305 discloses an air bag system which is controlled in accordance with signals from a deceleration sensor and a collision sensor.

U.S. Patent No. 4,359,715 discloses a diagnostic system for an air bag system.

U.S. Patent No. 3,687,213 discloses a control system for controlling an air bag system based on radio signals.

U.S. Patent No. 3,741,584 discloses an air bag system provided with separate inflation passages actuated independently.

U.S. Patent No. 3,966,224 discloses an air bag system provided with a plurality of inflation volumes actuated by respective impacts.

U.S. Patent No. 3,874,695 discloses an air bag system in which gas generator is stepwise actuated in accordance with impact levels.

It should however be noted that these conventional air bag systems are disadvantageous in adaptability. Generally, an air bag in the systems is stationary mounted on a car. An inflating time period is basically constant. In addition, a timing of initiation of inflation is not controllable. On the other hand, a seating condition of a passenger on a seat in the car usually varies person to person changing a distance between the passenger and the air bag. It follows that a timing when the air bag contacts with the passenger's breast varies depending on a seating condition of the passenger in case of collision and that the air bag may not contact with the passenger's breast in some cases. Thus, the conventional air bag system cannot provide a reliability in protecting the passenger.

It is therefore an object of the present invention

to provide an air bag system for an automobile which is reliable in case of collision.

It is another object of the present invention to provide an air bag system which can protect a passenger irrespective of his seating condition.

It is still another object of the present invention to provide a control for an air bag system in which an inflated air bag surely contacts with a passenger's breast to absorb a crash energy of a collision.

The above and other objects of the invention can be accomplished by an air bag system for an automobile comprising collision detecting means for detecting a collision of the automobile, gas generating means for generating a gas under pressure based on an output of said collision detecting means, shock absorbing bag means mounted on a front body member located in front of a seat for receiving the gas from the gas generator to take a predetermined inflated configuration, seating condition detecting means for detecting a seating condition of a passenger seated on the seat, control means for controlling an operation of the shock absorbing bag means in accordance with the seating condition of the passenger so that the shock absorbing bag means inflated is brought into an optimal contact with the passenger.

In one of preferred embodiments of the present invention, the seating condition detecting means detects a reclining angle of the seat of the passenger. The seating condition detecting means may detect a size and a posture of the passenger and a position of the passenger in the seat. The seating condition detecting means may detect whether or not the passenger puts a seat belt on. Alternatively, the seating condition detecting means may detect a position of the seat which is slidably mounted on the automobile in a longitudinal direction thereof.

The control means may control a time period between a collision and a finish of an inflation of the shock absorbing bag means. In this case, the control means may control a supply of the gas under pressure from the gas generating means introduced into the shock absorbing bag means to adjust a gas pressure from the gas generating means. In such a gas supply control, the number of gas discharging passage through which the gas under pressure is introduced into the shock absorbing bag means is controlled. Alternatively, a gas pressure from the gas discharging passage may be made for controlling the gas supply.

In another preferred embodiment, the control means may control a time period between a collision and an initiation of the gas supply. The control

means may control a position of the shock absorbing bag means in the longitudinal direction of the automobile to thereby control a distance between the shock absorbing bag means and the passenger.

Preferably, the control means may control the position of the shock absorbing bag means during the time period between the collision and the finish of the inflation of the shock absorbing bag means. In this case, the control means controls a position of the front body member in the longitudinal direction on which the shock absorbing bag means is mounted. Alternatively the control means may control the position of the shock absorbing bag means in an up and down direction of the automobile by providing the front body member with a swingable movement about a transverse axis.

In further preferred embodiment, the control means may control a quantity of the gas introduced into the shock absorbing bag means.

In still further embodiment of the present invention, the air bag system is provided with collision speed detecting means for detecting a speed in the collision based on a signal from the collision detecting means. In this embodiment, the control means controls a time period between the collision and an initiation of the inflation based on the speed of the collision.

Preferably, the control means may control a generation of the gas in accordance with a room temperature in a passenger compartment.

According to the present invention, the shock absorbing bag means or air bag means is brought into contact with the passenger's breast irrespective of the seating condition of the passenger when the automobile is involved in a collision so that the air bag system weakens a crash energy transferring to the passenger and keeps him safe.

The above and other features of the present invention will be apparent from the following description taking reference to the accompanying drawings.

Figure 1 is a perspective view showing a inside of a passenger compartment of an automobile provided with an air bag system in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 2 is a perspective view showing specifically the air bag system;

Figure 3 is a perspective view showing the air bag system similar to Figure 2;

Figure 4(a), 4(b) are views showing diaphragm valve employed for the air bag system;

Figure 5 is a sectional side view showing the seat and various sensors for sensing a seating condition of a passenger;

Figure 6 is a perspective view showing a lower portion of the seat;

Figure 7 is a sectional view of the portion shown in Figure 6;

Figure 8 is a sectional view of a pressure sensor employed for the present invention;

Figure 9 is a sectional view of an inflator;

Figure 10 is a block diagram showing of a control unit;

Figure 11 is a view showing a schematic electric circuit around the control unit;

Figure 12 through Figure 15 are graphical representation showing a relationship between a seating condition and a gas discharging pressure from the inflator;

Figure 16 is a diagrammatical view showing a pressure servo valve in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 17 is a diagrammatical view showing a connection of hydraulic valves and the inflator and the air bag in accordance with still another embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 18 is a block diagram of a control unit but showing further embodiment of the invention;

Figure 19 through Figure 22 are graphical representations showing a relationship between time difference to actuation of the inflator and the seating condition of the passenger in the embodiment of Figure 18;

Figure 23 is a perspective view showing an air bag system in accordance with further embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 24 is a block diagram of a control unit in accordance with the embodiment of Figure 23;

Figure 25 is a diagrammatical view showing a pressure servo valve for controlling an operation of a cylinder employed for the embodiment of Figure 23;

Figure 26 is a schematic side view showing a relationship between a seat position and a longitudinal position of the air bag system;

Figure 27 is a graphical representation showing a relationship between the seat position and the longitudinal position of the air bag system;

Figure 28 is a schematic side view showing a relationship between a reclining angle and the longitudinal position of the air bag system;

Figure 29 is a graphical representation showing a relationship between the reclining angle and the longitudinal position of the air bag system;

Figure 30 is a schematic side view showing a relationship between a condition as to whether the passenger wears a seat belt or not and the longitudinal position of the air bag system;

Figure 31 is a schematic side view showing a relationship between a size of the passenger and the longitudinal position of the air bag system;

Figure 32 is a graphical representation showing a relationship between the size of the passenger and the longitudinal position of the air bag

system;

Figure 33 is a schematic side view showing a relationship between a hip position of the passenger and the longitudinal position of the air bag system;

Figure 34 is a graphical representation showing a relationship between the hip position of the passenger and the longitudinal position of the air bag system;

Figure 35 is a graphical representation showing a relationship among the seat position, the reclining angle and the longitudinal position of the air bag system;

Figure 36 is a perspective view showing an air bag system in accordance with yet further embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 37 is a block diagram of a control unit in accordance with the embodiment of Figure 36;

Figure 38 is a schematic side view showing a relationship between a seat position and an angular position of the air bag system about a horizontal swinging axis;

Figure 39 is a graphical representation showing a relationship between the seat position and the angular position of the air bag system;

Figure 40 is a schematic side view showing a relationship between the reclining angle and the angular position of the air bag system;

Figure 41 is a graphical representation showing a relationship between the reclining angle and the angular position of the air bag system;

Figure 42 is a schematic side view showing a relationship between the condition as to whether the passenger wears a seat belt or not and the angular position of the air bag system;

Figure 43 is a schematic side view showing a relationship between the size of the passenger and the angular position of the air bag system;

Figure 44 is a graphical representation showing a relationship between the size of the passenger and the angular position of the air bag system;

Figure 45 is a schematic side view showing a relationship between the hip position of the passenger and the angular position of the air bag system;

Figure 46 is a graphical representation showing a relationship between the hip position of the passenger and the angular position of the air bag system;

Figure 47 is a graphical representation showing a relationship among the seat position, the reclining angle and the angular position of the air bag system;

Figure 48 is a perspective view showing inside of the passenger compartment in accordance with a further embodiment of the invention;

Figure 49 is a sectional view schematically

showing an arrangement of the air bag system in accordance with the embodiment of Figure 48;

Figure 50 is a block diagram showing a control unit in accordance with the embodiment of Figure 48;

Figure 51 is a sectional view showing the air bag system;

Figure 52 is a diagrammatical view showing a relationship between a seat switch, an object detector and a relief valve.

Referring to the drawings, specifically to Figures 1, there is shown an inside view of a front portion of a passenger compartment of an automobile. A bar-like steering support member 1 disposed between opposite cowl side panels and extending in a transverse direction of the automobile is provided for supporting a steering shaft 4 and a steering wheel mounted on a tip end of the steering shaft 4. An air bag device 5 is mounted on the steering support member 1 spaced from the steering shaft 4 transversely toward an assistant driver's seat. The cowl side panels are of high rigidity not to be remarkably deformed in case of a collision. The steering support member 1 is also rigid enough to resist against a crash energy caused by collision. There is disposed an air conditioning system 9 including a blower unit 6, a cooler unit 7 and a heater unit 8 underneath the air bag device 5.

As clearly shown in Figure 2, the air bag device 5 is provided with a casing 12 connected with a pair of brackets 11, 11 at opposite sides. The brackets 11, 11 are rigidly mounted on the steering support member 1.

The air bag device 5 is provided in the casing 12 with three inflators 17, 17, 17 for producing a gas under pressure, an air bag or shock absorbing bag 18 which is folded in a normal condition and receives the gas from the inflators 17, 17, 17 to take a predetermined inflated configuration in case of a collision. The inflators 17, 17, 17 are adapted to be actuated by a control signal from a control unit 70 based on an output of a collision detector 50 constituted by front sensors 51, 52 and rear sensors 54, 55.

As shown in Figure 3, the inflator 17 is provided with a discharge valve 17A having a diaphragm 17B formed with cut portions 17C. The valve 17A is normally closed as shown in Figure 4(a) wherein each petal-like portion of the diaphragm 17B contact with each other. The valve 17A is opened when a pressure more than a predetermined value acts thereon in a manner that each petal-like portion of the diaphragm 17B is spaced from each other as shown in Figure 4(b). The predetermined pressure of the valve 17A may be controlled in accordance with a material of the diaphragm 17A, depth and number of the cut portions and/or a thickness of the diaphragm 17A. The

air bag device 5 is provided at a tip end portion of the casing 12 with a cover 19 facing to a passenger for retaining the air bag 18 within the casing 12 in a normal condition of the automobile. The cover 19 is formed with cut out portions through which the air bag 18 projects from the case toward the passenger in response to an operation of the inflator 17 when the automobile is involved in a collision.

Now referring to Figure 5, there is shown a side view of the front portion of the passenger compartment. A seat device 21 is provided with a seat back 21A and a seat cushion 21B. The seat device 21 is provided with an upper rail 24 joined to a seat frame 21a of the seat cushion 21B as shown in Figure 6. The upper rail 24 is brought into a slidable engagement with a lower rail 23 mounted on a floor panel 22. Thus, the seat device 21 is slidable by a certain distance (200mm in the illustrated embodiment) in a longitudinal direction of the automobile relative to the floor panel 22 so as to adjust a longitudinal position thereof. The seat device 21 is provided with a position sensor 20 for detecting the longitudinal position thereof. The position sensor 20 is of a slide type rheostat and comprises an insulator 25 for electrically insulating between the upper rail 24 and the lower rail 23, a resistance 27 mounted on a base member 23A of the lower rail 23 and a contact member 28 provided on the upper rail 24 which is kept in contact with the resistance 27 as shown in Figure 7. When the seat device 21 moves on the rail 23 with the resistance 27 contacting with the contact member 28, a resistance value between them changes. Thus, an amount of the slidable movement of the seat device 21 on the rail 23 can be known by detecting the resistance value in the sensor 20.

A reclining angle sensor 30 is mounted on a rotation shaft 31a of the reclining mechanism 31 provided at a corner portion between the seat back 21A and a seat cushion 21B for detecting a reclining angle of the seat back 21A. The reclining angle sensor 30 is of a rotatable type rheostat. As the seat back 21A moves to change the reclining angle, a resistance value of the rheostat in the reclining mechanism 21 changes. Thus, the change in the reclining angle can be known by detecting a resistance value in the sensor 30.

Both the seat back 21A and the seat cushion 21B is provided with a plurality of pressure sensors 35 in a spaced relationship with each other which detects a pressure acting thereon. In the illustrated embodiment, the seat back 21A is provided with five sets of sensors 35 therein. The seat cushion 21B is provided with four sets of the sensors 35 therein. The pressure sensor 35 comprises a pair of electrical conductors 36, 36 such as an aluminum alloy, constituting opposite surface layers

and electrical insulator 37 such as a resilient synthetic resin, intervening the conductors 36 as shown in Figure 8. When a pressure is applied on the sensor 35, the intervening layer 37 of the resilient resin is deformed to change a distance between the two surface conductive layers 36, 36 so that an electrostatic capacity of the sensor 35 changes. Thus, a change in a pressure acting on the pressure sensor 35 can be known by detecting the change of the electrostatic capacity of the sensor 35. A pressure distribution across the seat device can be known by detecting a change in the pressure acting on respective sensors 35 distributed in the seat device 21. A seating condition of the passenger can be known from the pressure distribution on the seat device. For instance, if a relatively high pressure acts on the seat back 21A, this shows that the passenger leans against the seat back or lies on the seat back 21A. This means that an angle between an upper body portion of the passenger and a vertical line is big. On the other hand, if a pressure acting on the seat cushion is increased, the angle between the upper body portion and the vertical line is small.

A seat belt device 41 is provided for the passenger. The seat belt device 41 is provided with a buckle support 41A for supporting a buckle 42 at a tip end, and a seat belt member 41B provided at a tip end thereof with a tongue 43 which is removably engaged with the buckle 42. The seat belt device 41 is provided with a seat belt sensor 40 for detecting whether or not the passenger puts the seat belt device 41 on. The seat belt sensor 40 produces a signal denoting ON of the seat belt device 41 when the tongue 43 is engaged with the buckle 42. There is provided a plurality of thermometers 45 away from a direct sunlight for detecting a room temperature of the passenger compartment.

As shown in Figure 9, the inflator 17 is provided with a collision detecting section 171 including the heater 17a, an explosive section 172 including the explosive, a gas generating section 173 which produces a gas such as nitrogen gas in response to the explosion in the explosive section 172. The gas generated in the gas generating section 173 is introduced into the air bag 18 through gas discharging section 174 including gas passages 175.

The control unit 70 is provided with a gas generation setting section 101 for determining the number of the inflators 17 to be actuated for thereby controlling an amount and pressure of a gas to be supplied for the air bag 18, and a compensator 102 for providing the gas generation setting section 101 with a signal for compensating the amount of the gas to be supplied for the air bag 18 as shown in Figure 10. The compensator 102 comprises a

processing section 103 for receiving signals from the position sensor 20, the reclining angle sensor 30, the pressure sensors 35, the seat belt sensor 40 and the thermometers 45, and a comparator 104 for comparing a signal from the processing section 103 with the reference to produce a resultant signal to be introduced into the gas generation setting section.

The compensator 102 carries out a compensation based on for instance, control properties illustrated in the form of maps as shown in Figures 12 through 15. In compensating the gas supply control, there is a priority order wherein the signals from the position sensor 20, seat belt sensor 40, the reclining angle sensor 30, the pressure sensors 35 and the thermometers 45 are considered in this order.

The collision detecting sensor 50 is provided with a plurality of front sensors (two front sensors 51, 52 in the illustrated embodiment) mounted on a front end member such as a bumper and a plurality of rear sensors (three rear sensors 53, 54 and 55 in the illustrated embodiment) mounted on a front body member such as a dash board. When at least one of the front sensors 51, 52 and at least one of the rear sensors 53, 54 and 55 detects a collision of the automobile, the inflator 17 is actuated to supply the gas to the air bag 18 so that the passenger is kept away from a front windshield glass 48 and the steering wheel 3.

Hereinafter, there is described an electric circuit of the air bag device taking reference with Figure 11.

The inflator 17 comprises a heater 17a therein which is connected at one end with one ends of the front sensors 51, 52 in parallel. The front sensors 51, 52 are connected with the control unit 70 at the other ends in parallel. The control unit 70 is connected with a main power supply line L for the air bag device 5. Thus, the heater 17a of the inflator 17 is connected with the main power supply through the control unit 70. The other end of the heater 17a is connected with one ends of the rear sensors 53, 54 and 55 in parallel. The other ends of the rear sensors 53, 54 and 55 are grounded. When at least one of the front sensors 51 and 52 are turned on and at least one of the rear sensors 53, 54 and 55 are turned on, a power is supplied for the heater 17a to heat it so that an explosive such as gunpowder is fired to generate a gas for inflating the air bag 18. This structure of the collision sensor 50 enables to figure out a collision speed of the automobile based on a time difference when more than two among them are actuated. On the main supply line L are provided a protection fuse 56, a power source 57 and a condenser 58 as a back up power source. A system down switch 59, the front sensors 51, 52, the

inflator 17 and the rear sensors 53, 54 and 55 are also provided on the main supply line L.

The electric circuit for the air bag device 5 is provided with a failure diagnostic unit 60 including a failure detecting device 61 for detecting a failure of the device 5 and a failure recording device 63. The front sensors 51, 52 and the rear sensors 53, 54 and 55 are connected with the failure detecting device 61 through monitor lines 511, 521, 531, 541 and 551 for continually supplying a small current to monitor a circuit. In the case where a change of the current occurs in the sensors 51, 52, 53, 54 and 55, when the failure detecting device 61 detects the change, the system down switch 59 is turned off. The inflator 17 is also connected with the failure detecting device 61 through a monitor line 561 so that a burnout of the heater 17a of the inflator 17 can be detected by the failure detecting device 61. The failure diagnostic unit 60 is connected with an alarm circuit 64 including an alarm device such as a buzzer 65 which is connected with the power source 57 through a manual switch 62. Thus, when the failure diagnostic circuit detects a failure of the air bag device 5, the buzzer 65 is actuated to inform the passenger of the failure.

The sensors 51, 52, 53, 54 and 55 are provided with resistances 51R, 52R, 53R, 54R and 55R respectively. The resistance values thereof are much greater than that of the heater 17a. Therefore, a current in the resistances 51R, 52R, 53R, 54R and 55R can be kept at a small value which is short to fire the explosive.

In operation, when it is found by means of the position sensor 20 that the seat 21 is located at a forward position, the control unit 70 controls the inflators 17 to increase an amount of the gas or gas discharging pressure from the inflators 17 for thereby advancing a timing when the air bag 18 is maximized because a distance between the passenger and the air bag device 5 is reduced. Thus, the air bag device 5 is inflated to contact with the passenger's breast to exert a shock absorbing effect at the optimal timing. The gas discharging pressure from the inflators 17 is increased to inflate the air bag 18 rapidly as the seat position moves forwardly as shown in Figure 12.

When it is found by the reclining angle sensor 30 that the reclining angle of the seat 21 is relatively small, the control unit 70 controls the inflators 17 to increase the gas or gas discharging pressure from the inflators 17 for advancing the timing when the air bag 18 is maximized because the passenger's breast is close to the air bag device 5. As a result, the inflated air bag is brought into contact with the passenger's breast at the optimal timing wherein the shock absorbing effect of the air bag 18 is maximized. The gas discharging pressure from the inflators 17 is increased to inflate the air

bag 18 quickly as the reclining angle of the seat 21 is decreased as shown in Figure 13.

When the passenger does not put the seat belt device 41 on, the control unit 70 advances the timing of inflation of the air bag 18. This is because the passenger is free to move forwardly in the case where he does not put the seat belt device 41 on reducing the distance to the air bag device 5.

When it is found from the pressure sensors 35 that the passenger takes a posture in which the angle between the upper body portion of the passenger and the vertical line is large in the case where his hip position is in a forward position in the seat 21, the control unit 70 controls the inflators 17 to retard the timing when the passenger contacts with the air bag device 5 by reducing the gas amount or pressure from the inflators 17. This is because the breast of the passenger is relatively far away from the air bag device 5 since he leans against the seat back 21B. Thus, the control unit 70 advances the timing of the inflation of the air bag 18 as the hip position of the passenger moves rearwardly as shown in Figure 14.

When it is found by the thermometers 45 that the room temperature is relatively high, the control unit 70 controls the inflators 17 to reduce a gas generation therefrom, since it is easy to inflate the air bag 18 because of a low density of air in the passenger compartment. The air bag device 5 can be provided for not only the driver's assistant but also the driver.

In controlling the inflation speed of the air bag 18, a relief valve may be provided on the air bag for relieving the gas in the air bag 18 in accordance with a control signal from the control unit 70.

Referring to Figure 16, there is shown another embodiment of the gas generation control system of the present invention. In the illustrated gas generation control system, the gas generation setting section 101 controls an opening of a magnetic proportion type pressure servo valve 105 provided between the inflator 17 and the air bag 18 to thereby control an inflation speed of the air bag 18 in accordance with a signal from the compensator 102 and the collision sensor 50. For this purpose, at least one pressure servo valve 105 is provided between the inflator 17 and the air bag 17 with the diaphragm valve 17A or without the diaphragm valve 17A.

Referring to Figure 17, there is shown still another embodiment of the gas generation control system. In the illustrated gas generation control system, three on-off solenoid valves 106, 107 and 108 in parallel and three pressure setting solenoid valves 109, 110 and 111 in parallel are provided between the inflator 17 and the air bag 18. The on-off valve 106 and pressure setting valve 109, 107 and 110, and 108 and 111 are disposed in serial

respectively. Pressure values set by the pressure setting valves 109, 110 and 111 are different. The gas generation setting section 101 controls actuation of the on-off solenoid valves 106, 107 and 108 to communicate the inflator 17 with the air bag 18. Thus, the gas pressure introduced into the air bag 18 can be controlled. It follows that a time period of the inflating operation of the air bag 18 can be controlled. Moreover, this structure enables the gas generation setting section 101 of the control unit 70 to control the timing of initiation in the inflating operation of the air bag 18.

Hereinafter, there is described a further embodiment of the present invention taking reference with Figures 18 through 23. In this embodiment, the air bag device 5 is provided with a size sensor 47 for detecting a size of the passenger, specifically detecting a size of the upper body of the passenger. The size sensor 47 is disposed within a room lamp device mounted on a ceiling of the passenger compartment. The size sensor 47 is of an ultrasonic sounding device which produces an ultrasonic wave and catches the reflected wave to detect a height of the passenger on the seat 21. The air bag device 5 is also provided with a collision speed sensor 46 for detecting a speed of an object moving toward the automobile in a relative situation taking advantage of the Doppler effect so that a magnitude of the collision can be evaluated. The collision speed sensor 46 is mounted on the front bumper of the automobile. The control unit 70 receives signals from various sensors including the position sensor 20, the reclining angle sensor 30, the pressure sensors 35, the collision speed sensor 46 and the size sensor as well as the former embodiment. The processing section 103 processes signals from the sensors and provides the comparator 104 with a resultant output. The comparator 104 receives the signal from the processing section 103 and compares the signal with the reference to produce a compensating signal for compensating a control signal of the inflator 17. The control unit 70 is provided with a control section 112 for determining a timing of the actuation of the detecting section 171 of the inflator 17. In the case where the air bag device 5 is provided with a plurality of the inflators 17, the respective inflators 17 can be actuated at the different timings for controlling the gas discharging pressure for the air bag 18. In compensating the gas supply control, there is a priority order wherein the signals from the collision speed sensor 46, the reclining angle sensor 30, the pressure sensors 35 and the size sensor 47 are taken into account in this order.

In operation of the illustrated embodiment, when it is found by the reclining angle sensor 30 that the reclining angle of the seat 21 is relatively small, the control unit 70 reduces a time period

between the collision and the actuation of the inflator 17. In other words, the control unit 70 controls the inflator 17 to inflate the air bag quickly because the passenger's breast is close to the air bag device 5. In this connection, the timing of the collision is a time when at least one of the sensors 51, 52, 53, 54 and 55 is actuated. And the timing of the actuation of the inflator 17 is a time when an actuating signal is introduced into the detecting section 171 of the inflator from the control unit 70. It follows that the inflated air bag is brought into contact with the passenger's breast at the optimal timing wherein the shock absorbing effect of the air bag 18 is maximized. The time difference between the collision and the actuation of the inflator 17 is reduced as the reclining angle of the seat 21 is increased as shown in Figure 19.

The control unit 70 reduces the time difference between the collision and the actuation of the inflator 17 based on the signal from the size sensor 47 in the case where the passenger is big as shown in Figure 20.

When it is found from the pressure sensors 35 that the passenger takes a posture in which the angle between the upper body portion of the passenger and the vertical line is large in the case where his hip position is in a forward position in the seat 21, the control unit 70 compensates the control signal to the inflator 17 in a manner that the time difference between the collision and the actuation of the inflator 17 is reduced as the hip position of the passenger moves forwardly as shown in Figure 21.

When it is found through the collision speed sensor 46 that the collision speed is high and thus the magnitude of the collision is considered great, the control unit 70 compensates the output signal to reduce the time difference between the collision and the actuation of the inflator 17 as shown in Figure 22.

Hereinafter, there is described a further embodiment of the present invention taking reference with Figure 23 through Figure 35.

Referring to Figure 23, the air bag device 5 is movably carried in the longitudinal direction of the automobile by the brackets 11, 11 at opposite sides. The brackets 11, 11 are rigidly mounted on the steering support member 1. A pair of slide rails 13, 13 of T-shaped configuration in section is mounted on opposite sides of the casing 12. The slide rails 14, 14 are slidably engaged with a pair of rail guides fixed to the brackets 11, 11 respectively. There are provided a pair of hydraulic cylinder devices 15, 15 of which main bodies 15a, 15a are secured to the brackets 11, 11 through support members 11a, 11a, and bolts 11b, 11b. A piston rod 15b of each of the cylinder device 15 extending in parallel with the rail 13 is connected with the

casing 12 at the tip end through a joint 16 above the rail 13 so that the air bag device 5 can move along the rail guides 14, 14 in accordance with an operation of the cylinder device 15.

As shown in Figure 24, the control unit 70 receives signals from various sensors including the position sensor 20, the reclining angle sensor 30, the pressure sensors 35, the seat belt sensor 40 and the size sensor 47. The processing section 103 processes signals from the sensors and provides the comparator 104 with a resultant output. The comparator 104 receives the signal from the processing section 103 and compares the signal with the reference to produce a compensating signal for compensating a control signal of the inflator 17. The control unit 70 is provided with a control section 112 for receiving a signal from a stroke sensor 113 which detects a stroke of the piston rod 15b of the cylinder device 15 and producing a control signal to a stroke setting section 114 which controls the stroke of the cylinder device 15 in light of the output of the compensator 102. Thus, the distance between the passenger and the air bag device 5 is optimized in accordance with the seating condition of the passenger. Typically, the stroke setting section 114 is constituted by a magnetic proportion type pressure servo valve 115 as shown in Figure 25. the pressure servo valve 115 is connected to respective oil chambers of the cylinder device 15 at one hand and connected with a hydraulic power source 116 and is controlled by a signal from the control unit 70 to maintain the stroke of the cylinder device 15 at a predetermined value by controlling a quantity of oil passing there-through.

According to the illustrated embodiment, the air bag device 5 is moved rearwardly as shown in Figure 26 from a position of a chain line to a position of a real line when the seat position is moved rearwardly from a position of a chain line to a position of a real line in Figure 26 so that the distance between the air bag device 5 and the passenger can be maintained at a substantially constant value. Accordingly, the position of the air bag 5 is controlled to compensate an offset from a base position of the seat 21 as shown in Figure 27. That is, the movement of the air bag device 5 is increased as the amount of the offset from the base position of the seat 21 is increased.

When the seat back 21B is swung to increase the reclining angle of the seat 21 from a position of a chain line to a real line as shown in Figure 28, the control unit 70 controls the pressure servo valve 115 to move the air bag 5 rearwardly from a position of a chain line to a position of real line in Figure 28 to keep the distance between the air bag device 5 and the passenger's breast at a constant value. As shown in Figure 29, the air bag device 5

is moved rearwardly as the reclining angle is increased. It follows that the inflated air bag is brought into contact with the passenger's breast at the optimal timing irrespective of a change in the reclining angle.

When the passenger puts the seat belt device 41 on, the control unit 70 positions the air bag device 5 at a forward position as shown by a real line in Figure 30. On the other hand, when the passenger does not put the seat belt on, the control unit 70 positions the air bag device 5 at a rearward position as shown by a chain line in Figure 30.

The control unit 70 controls the cylinder 15 to position the air bag device 5 at a rearward position as shown by a real line in Figure 31 when the passenger is big in size such as adult in view of the signal from the size sensor 47. To the contrary, the control unit 70 positions the air bag device 5 at a relatively forward position as shown by a chain line in Figure 31 when the passenger is small such as a child. As shown in Figure 32, the control unit 70 controls the longitudinal position of the air bag device 5 in accordance with the size of the passenger to keep the distance between the passenger and the air bag device constant.

When the passenger takes a posture leaning against the seat back 21B, namely when his hip position is in a forward position in the seat cushion 21A, the control unit 70 positions the air bag device 5 at a forward position as shown by a real line in Figure 33. Contrarily, the control unit 70 positions the air bag device 5 rearwardly as shown by a chain line in Figure 33 when the passenger takes a relatively upright posture as shown by a chain line in Figure 33. As shown in Figure 34, the control unit 70 controls the position of the air bag device 5 in accordance with the posture or the hip position in a manner that the air bag device is moved forwardly as the hip position of the passenger is moved forwardly. It follows that the inflated air bag is brought into contact with the passenger's breast at the optimal timing irrespective of the posture of the passenger.

Preferably, the control of the air bag position is made based on a combination of two or more factors as aforementioned.

For instance, where the control is made in accordance with both the seat position and the reclining angle of the seat 21, the movement L of the air bag device 5 from the base position can be illustrated as shown in Figure 35.

Hereinafter, there is described a further embodiment of the present invention taking reference with Figure 36 through Figure 48.

Referring to Figure 36, the air bag device 5 is carried by the brackets 11, 11 at opposite sides through pivot pins 11a, 11a for a swingable move-

ment about the pivot pins 11a, 11a. The brackets 11, 11 are rigidly mounted on the steering support member 1. A sector gear 13 formed with a gear portion 13a is mounted on one side of the casing 12. A servo motor 14 provided with a worm gear 15 is mounted on one of the brackets 11, 11. The worm gear 15 is adapted to be engaged with the gear portion 13a of the sector gear. The servo motor 14 is controlled by a control signal from the control unit 70 to provide the air bag device 5 with an optimal angular position for the passenger in accordance with the seating condition of the passenger.

As shown in Figure 37, the control unit 70 receives signals from various sensors including the position sensor 20, the reclining angle sensor 30, the pressure sensors 35, the seat belt sensor 40 and the size sensor 47. The processing section 103 processes signals from the sensors and provides the comparator 104 with a resultant output. The comparator 104 receives the signal from the processing section 103 and compares the signal with the reference to produce a compensating signal for compensating a control signal of the inflator 17. The control unit 70 is provided with a control section 112 for receiving a signal from an angular position sensor 116 which detects an angular position of the air bag device 5 and producing a control signal to the servo motor 14 in accordance with the output of the compensator 102. Thus, the orientation of the air bag device 5 to the passenger is optimized in accordance with the seating condition of the passenger.

According to the illustrated embodiment, the air bag device 5 is swung to orient upwardly as shown by a chain line in Figure 38 from a base position shown by a real line when the seat position is moved forwardly as shown by a chain line from a base position shown by a real line. This is because the seat 21 is moved slightly upwardly as well when moved forwardly. Accordingly, the air bag 5 is swung upwardly as the seat is moved forwardly as shown in Figure 39.

When the seat back 21B is swung to increase the reclining angle of the seat 21 from a position of a real line to a chain line as shown in Figure 40, the control unit 70 controls the servo motor 14 to swing the air bag 5 downwardly from a position of a real line to a position of chain so that the air bag device 5 contacts with the passenger's breast when inflated. As shown in Figure 41, the air bag device 5 is swung downwardly as the reclining angle is increased. It follows that the inflated air bag is brought into contact with the passenger's breast at the optimal timing irrespective of a change in the reclining angle.

When the passenger puts the seat belt device 41 on, the control unit 70 controls the servo motor

14 to keep the air bag device 5 at a base angular position as shown by a real line in Figure 42. On the other hand, when the passenger does not put the seat belt on, the control unit 70 urges the servo motor 14 to swing the air bag device 5 upwardly to an angular position as shown by a chain line.

The control unit 70 controls the servo motor 14 to orient the air bag device 5 relatively upwardly as shown by a real line in Figure 43 when the passenger is big in size such as adult in view of the signal from the size sensor 47. To the contrary, the control unit 70 positions the air bag device 5 to orient relatively downwardly as shown by a chain line when the passenger is small such as a child. As shown in Figure 44, the control unit 70 controls the air bag device 5 to orient upwardly as the passenger is big in size to keep the distance between the passenger and the air bag device constant.

When the passenger takes a posture leaning against the seat back 21B, namely when his hip position is in a forward position in the seat cushion 21A as shown by a chain line in Figure 45, the control unit 70 orients the air bag device 5 relatively downwardly as shown by a chain line. Contrarily, the control unit 70 orients the air bag device 5 relatively upwardly as shown by a real line when the passenger takes a relatively upright posture as shown by a real line. As shown in Figure 46, the control unit 70 controls the position of the air bag device 5 in accordance with the posture or the hip position in a manner that the air bag device is oriented downwardly as the hip position of the passenger is moved forwardly. It follows that the inflated air bag is brought into contact with the passenger's breast at the optimal timing irrespective of the posture of the passenger.

Preferably, the control of the angular position of the air bag device 5 is made based on a combination of two or more factors as aforementioned. For instance, where the control is made in accordance with both the size of the passenger and the reclining angle of the seat 21, an angular offset α of the air bag device 5 from the base position can be illustrated as shown in Figure 47.

According to the present invention, a transverse angular position about a substantially vertical axis may be controlled as well as the angular position about a substantially horizontal axis as mentioned above.

Hereinafter, there is described a still further embodiment of the invention taking reference with Figure 48 through Figure 52.

As shown in Figure 48 and 49, the air bag device 5 is arranged within a front body member or instrument panel 80 just behind a cover portion 80a thereof for a passenger P seated on a driver's assistant seat 21. The seat 21 provided with a seat

switch 81 for detecting that the passenger P seats on the seat 21. An object detector 82 is mounted on the panel 80 adjacent to a position where the air bag device 5 is located. The object detector 82 constituted by for instance, an infrared sensor detects an object intervening between the instrument panel 80 and the passenger P, such as a child standing forward of the passenger P, a baggage on a lap of the passenger and the like.

Referring to Figure 50, the control unit 70 receives signals from various sensors including the collision sensor 50, the seat switch 81, and the object detector 82. The processing section 103 processes signals from the sensors and provides the comparator 104 with a resultant output. The control unit 70 is provided with a control section 112 for receiving the output signal from the processing section 103 and producing a control signal to the inflator and a relief valve 83 provided in the air bag device 5 as shown in Figure 51 for relieving the gas in the air bag 18.

The control unit 70 controls the air bag device 5 in accordance with the seating condition including a circumstantial condition of the passenger based on the signals from the seat switch 81 and the object detector 83.

Referring to Figure 52, there is shown a relationship between an operation of the relief valve 83 by means of the control unit 70 and an operation of the seat switch and the object detector 82.

In situation 1 wherein, for example, the passenger P seats on the seat 21 and a child stands by the passenger, the control unit 70 controls the relief valve to open in case of a collision so that the inflated air bag does not hit the child hard for preventing the child from being injured due to the inflation of the air bag device 5.

In situation 2 wherein the passenger seats on the seat 21 and no objection between the front body member and the passenger, the control unit 70 keep the relief valve close to provide the air bag device 5 with a normal inflation.

In situation 3 wherein there is no passenger on the seat 21 but an object such as a child intervenes between the seat 21 and the front body member or the instrument panel 80, the control unit 70 controls the relief valve 83 to open not to injure the child due to the inflation of the air bag 18.

In situation 4 wherein there is no passenger on the seat and no object intervening, the control unit 70 controls the air bag device 5 not to be inflated even in case of a collision. It will be apparent that various modifications and improvements may be made based on the above descriptions by those skilled in the art without departing from the scope of the claims as attached.

Claims

1. An air bag system for an automobile comprising collision detecting means for detecting a collision of the automobile, gas generating means for generating a gas under pressure based on an output of said collision detecting means, shock absorbing bag means mounted on a front body member located in front of a seat for receiving the gas from the gas generator to take a predetermined inflated configuration, seating condition detecting means for detecting a seating condition of a passenger seated on the seat, control means for controlling an operation of the shock absorbing bag means in accordance with the seating condition of the passenger so that the shock absorbing bag means inflated is brought into an optimal contact with the passenger.

2. An air bag system as recited in claim 1 wherein the seating condition detecting means detects a reclining angle of the seat of the passenger.

3. An air bag system as recited in claim 1 wherein the seating condition detecting means detects a size of the passenger.

4. An air bag system as recited in claim 1 wherein the seating condition detecting means detects a posture of the passenger.

5. An air bag system as recited in claim 1 wherein the seating condition detecting means detects whether or not the passenger puts a seat belt on.

6. An air bag system as recited in claim 1 wherein the seating condition detecting means detects whether or not there is an object other than the passenger between the seat and the front body member.

7. An air bag system as recited in claim 1 wherein the seating condition detecting means detects a position of the seat in a longitudinal direction of the automobile.

8. An air bag system as recited in claim 1 wherein the control means controls a time period between a collision and a finish of an inflation of the shock absorbing bag means.

9. An air bag system as recited in claim 8 wherein the control means controls a supply of the gas under pressure from the gas generating means introduced into the shock absorbing bag means.

10. An air bag system as recited in claim 9 wherein the control means is constituted by a pressure adjusting means for adjusting a gas pressure from the gas generating means.

11. An air bag system as recited in claim 10 wherein the pressure adjusting means controls the number of gas discharging passage through which the gas under pressure is introduced into the shock absorbing bag means.

12. An air bag system as recited in claim 10

wherein the pressure adjusting means controls the gas pressure from at least one of the gas generating means.

13. An air bag system as recited in claim 8 wherein the control means controls a time period between a collision and an initiation of the gas supply.

14. An air bag system as recited in claim 1 wherein the control means controls a position of the shock absorbing bag means in a longitudinal direction of the automobile to thereby control a distance between the shock absorbing bag means and the passenger.

15. An air bag system as recited in claim 14 wherein the control means controls the position of the shock absorbing bag means in the longitudinal direction during a time period between the collision and the finish of the inflation of the shock absorbing bag means.

16. An air bag system as recited in claim 14 wherein the control means controls a longitudinal position of the front body on which the shock absorbing bag means is mounted.

17. An air bag system as recited in claim 1 wherein the control means controls an angular position of the shock absorbing bag means about a transverse axis in an up and down direction of the automobile.

18. An air bag system as recited in claim 17 wherein the control means controls the angular position of the shock absorbing bag means about the transverse axis in the up and down direction of the automobile during a time period between the collision and the finish of the inflation of the shock absorbing bag means.

19. An air bag system as recited in claim 17 wherein the transverse axis is provided on the front body member.

20. An air bag system as recited in claim 1 wherein the control means controls a quantity of the gas introduced into the shock absorbing bag means.

21. An air bag system for an automobile comprising collision detecting means for detecting a collision of the automobile, gas generating means for generating a gas under pressure based on an output of said collision detecting means, shock absorbing bag means mounted on a front body member located in front of a seat for receiving the gas from the gas generator to take a predetermined inflated configuration, collision speed detecting means for detecting a collision speed of the automobile, timing setting means for setting a timing of an actuation of the gas generating means after a detection of the collision.

22. An air bag system as recited in claim 21 wherein the collision speed detecting means detects the collision speed based on a signal from

the collision detecting means.

23. An air bag system as recited in claim 21 wherein the timing setting means evaluates a magnitude of the collision based on a signal from the collision speed detecting means and compensates the timing of the actuation of the gas generating means in a manner that a time difference between the actuation of the gas generating means and the detection of the collision is reduced. detecting means.

24. An air bag system for an automobile comprising collision detecting means for detecting a collision of the automobile, gas generating means for generating a gas under pressure based on an output of said collision detecting means, shock absorbing bag means mounted on a front body member located in front of a seat for receiving the gas from the gas generator to take a predetermined inflated configuration, temperature detecting means for detecting a temperature of a passenger compartment, pressure setting means for setting a gas pressure from the gas generating means in accordance with the temperature of the passenger compartment.

25. An air bag system as recited in claim 24 further comprising compensating means for reducing the gas pressure from the gas generating means as the temperature of the passenger compartment is increase.

26. An air bag system as recited in claim 10 wherein the pressure adjusting means increases the gas pressure from the gas generating means as the seat moves forwardly.

27. An air bag system as recited in claim 10 wherein the pressure adjusting means increases the gas pressure from the gas generating means as a reclining angle of the seat is decreased.

28. An air bag system as recited in claim 10 wherein the pressure adjusting means increases the gas pressure from the gas generating means when the passenger does not put a seat belt on.

29. An air bag system as recited in claim 10 wherein the pressure adjusting means increases the gas pressure from the gas generating means when a hip position of the passenger is located at a rearward position of the seat.

30. An air bag system as recited in claim 10 wherein the pressure adjusting means increases the gas pressure from the gas generating means as a temperature of a passenger compartment is decreased.

31. An air bag system as recited in claim 13 wherein the time period is increased as a reclining angle of the seat is increased.

32. An air bag system as recited in claim 13 wherein the time period is decreased as a size of the passenger is increased.

33. An air bag system as recited in claim 13

wherein the time period is increased when a hip position of the passenger is located at a rearward position of the seat.

34. An air bag system as recited in claim 14 wherein the control means moves the shock absorbing bag means rearwardly as the seat is moved rearwardly.

35. An air bag system as recited in claim 14 wherein the control means moves the shock absorbing bag means rearwardly as a reclining angle of the seat is increased.

36. An air bag system as recited in claim 14 wherein the control means moves the shock absorbing bag means forwardly when the passenger puts a seat belt on.

37. An air bag system as recited in claim 14 wherein the control means moves the shock absorbing bag means forwardly when the passenger is big in size.

38. An air bag system as recited in claim 14 wherein the control means moves the shock absorbing bag means forwardly when a hip position of the passenger is located at a relatively forward position in the seat.

39. An air bag system as recited in claim 14 wherein the control means controls a longitudinal position of the shock absorbing bag means in accordance with a combination of two or more factors of the seating condition.

40. An air bag system as recited in claim 17 wherein the control means swings the shock absorbing bag means upwardly as the seat is moved forwardly.

41. An air bag system as recited in claim 17 wherein the control means swings the shock absorbing bag means downwardly as a reclining angle of the seat is increased.

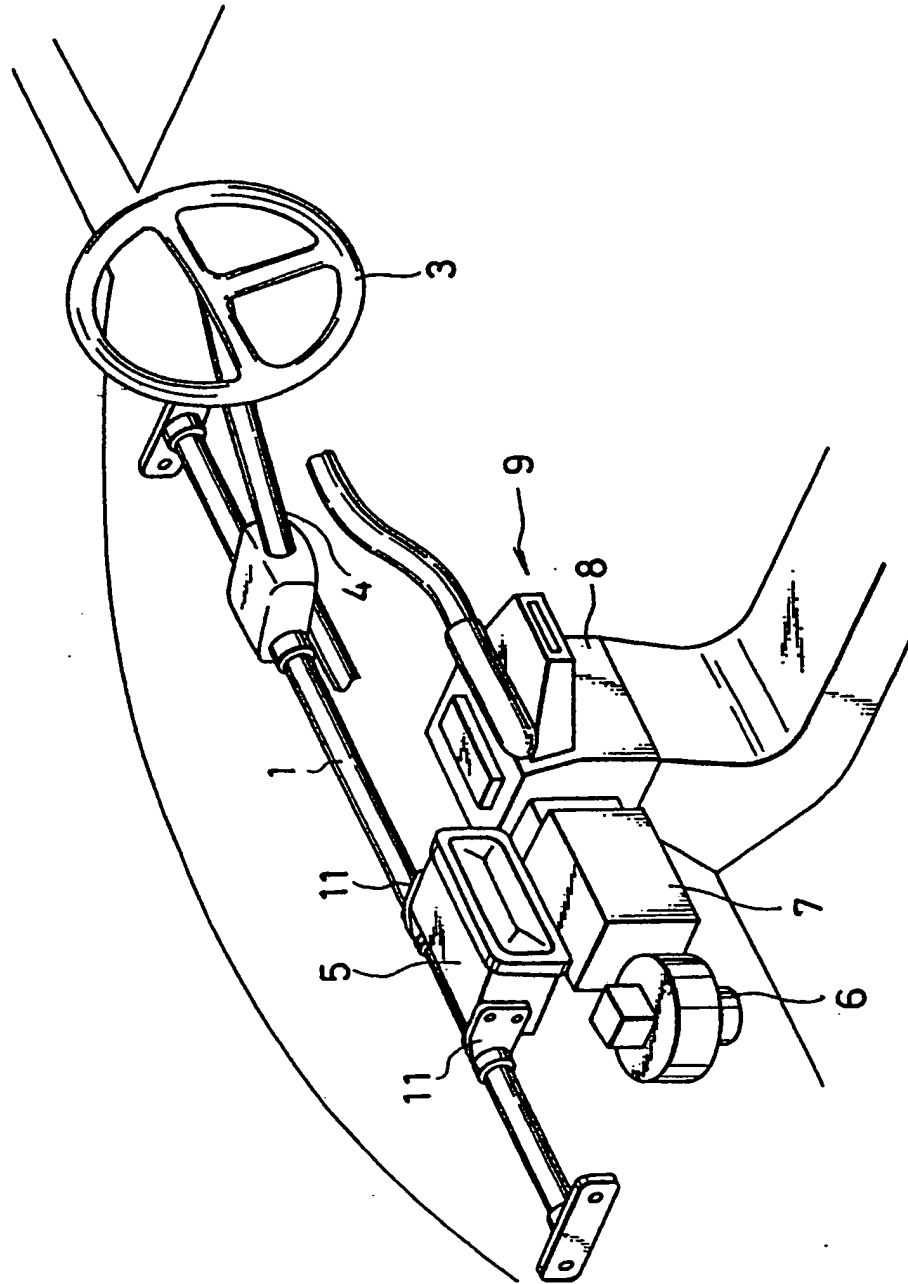
42. An air bag system as recited in claim 17 wherein the control means swings the shock absorbing bag means upwardly when the passenger does not put a seat belt on.

43. An air bag system as recited in claim 17 wherein the control means swings the shock absorbing bag means downwardly when the passenger is small in size.

44. An air bag system as recited in claim 17 wherein the control means swings the shock absorbing bag means downwardly when a hip position of the passenger is located at a relatively forward position in the seat.

45. An air bag system as recited in claim 17 wherein the control means controls an angular position of the shock absorbing bag means in accordance with a combination of two or more factors of the seating condition..

FIG.1



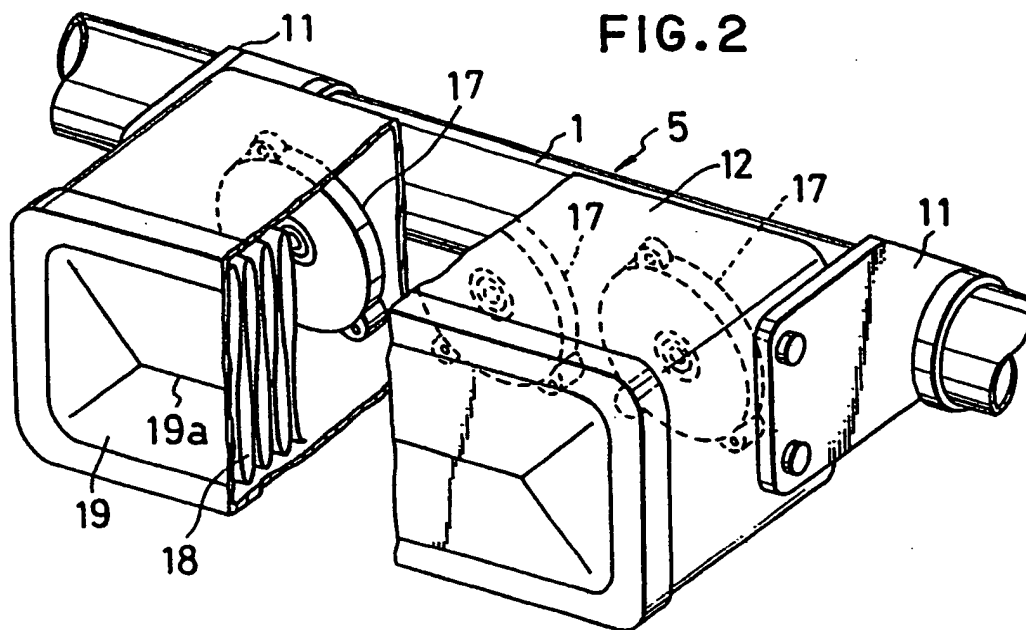


FIG. 4a

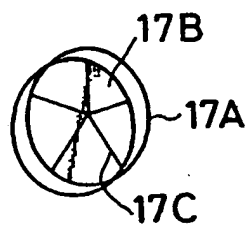


FIG. 4b

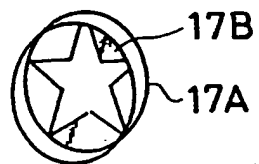
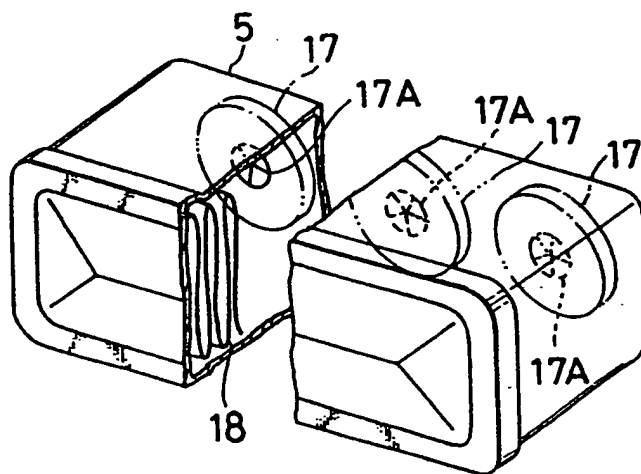


FIG. 3



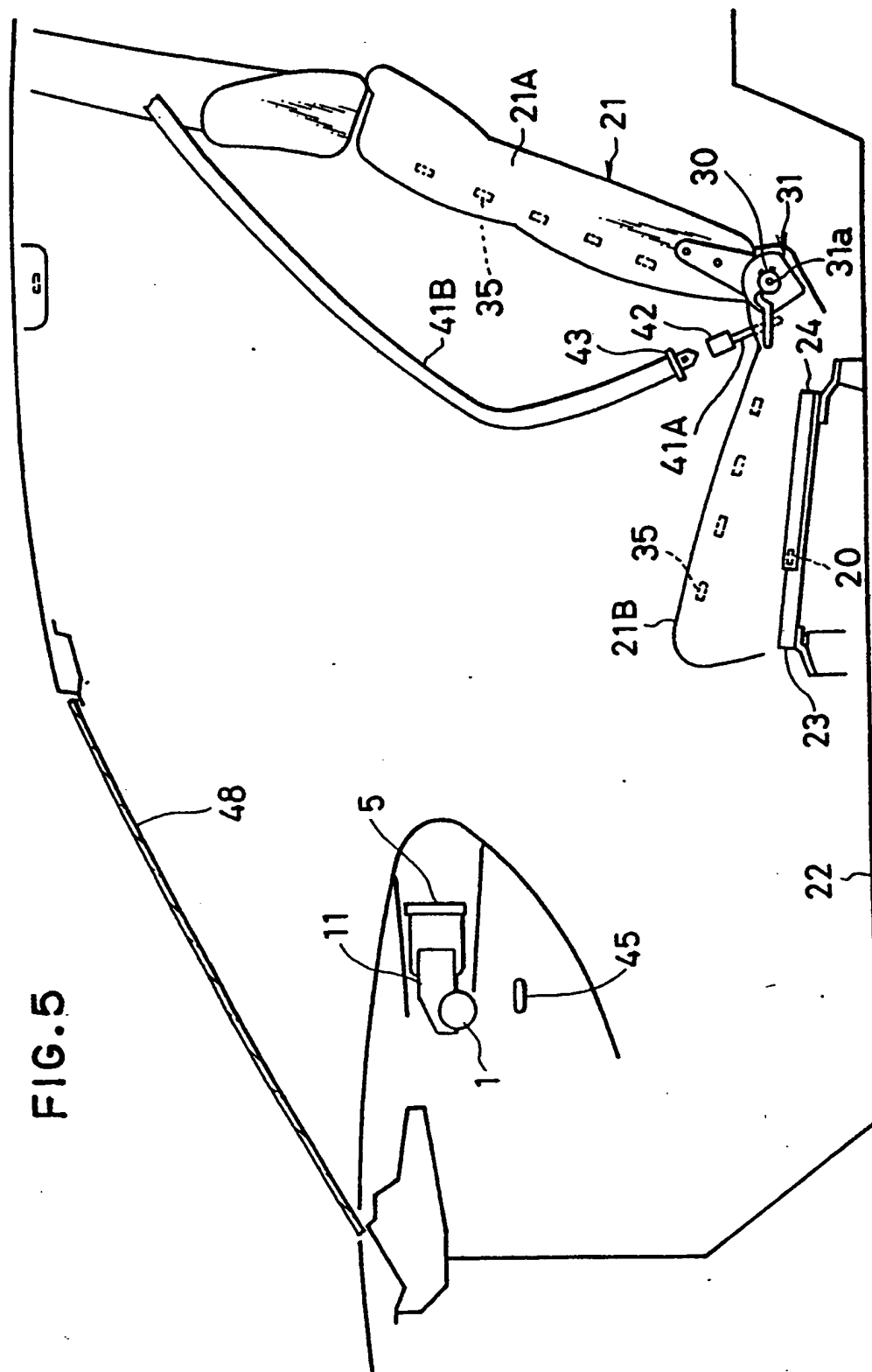


FIG. 6

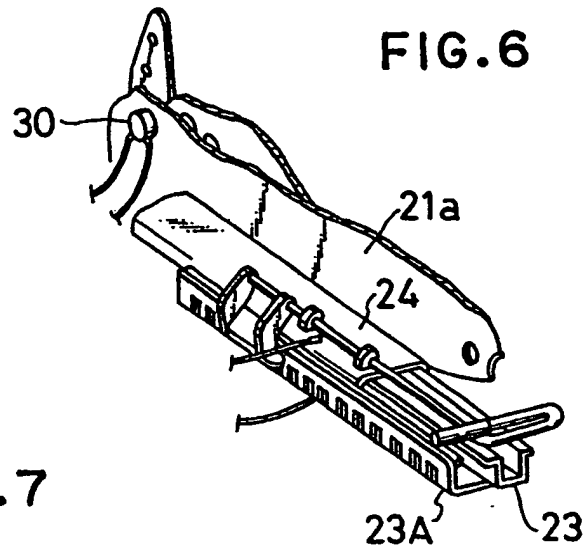


FIG. 7

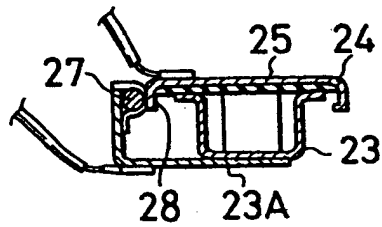


FIG. 8

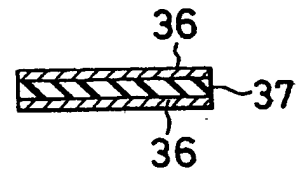


FIG. 9

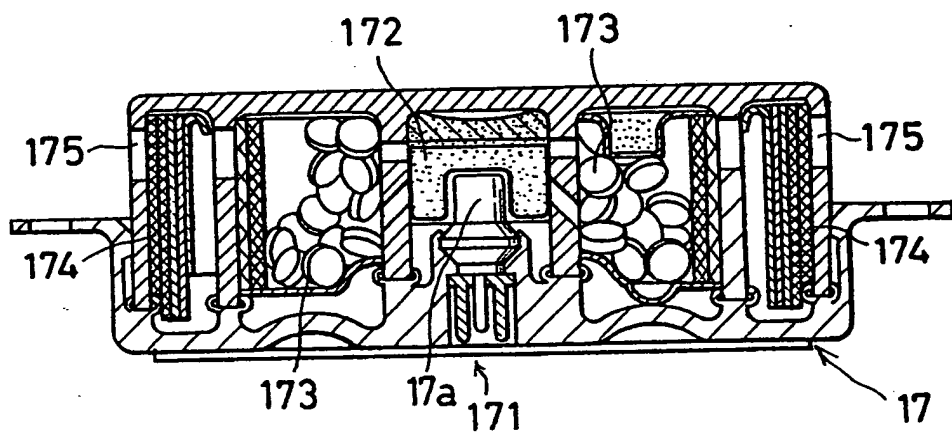


FIG. 10

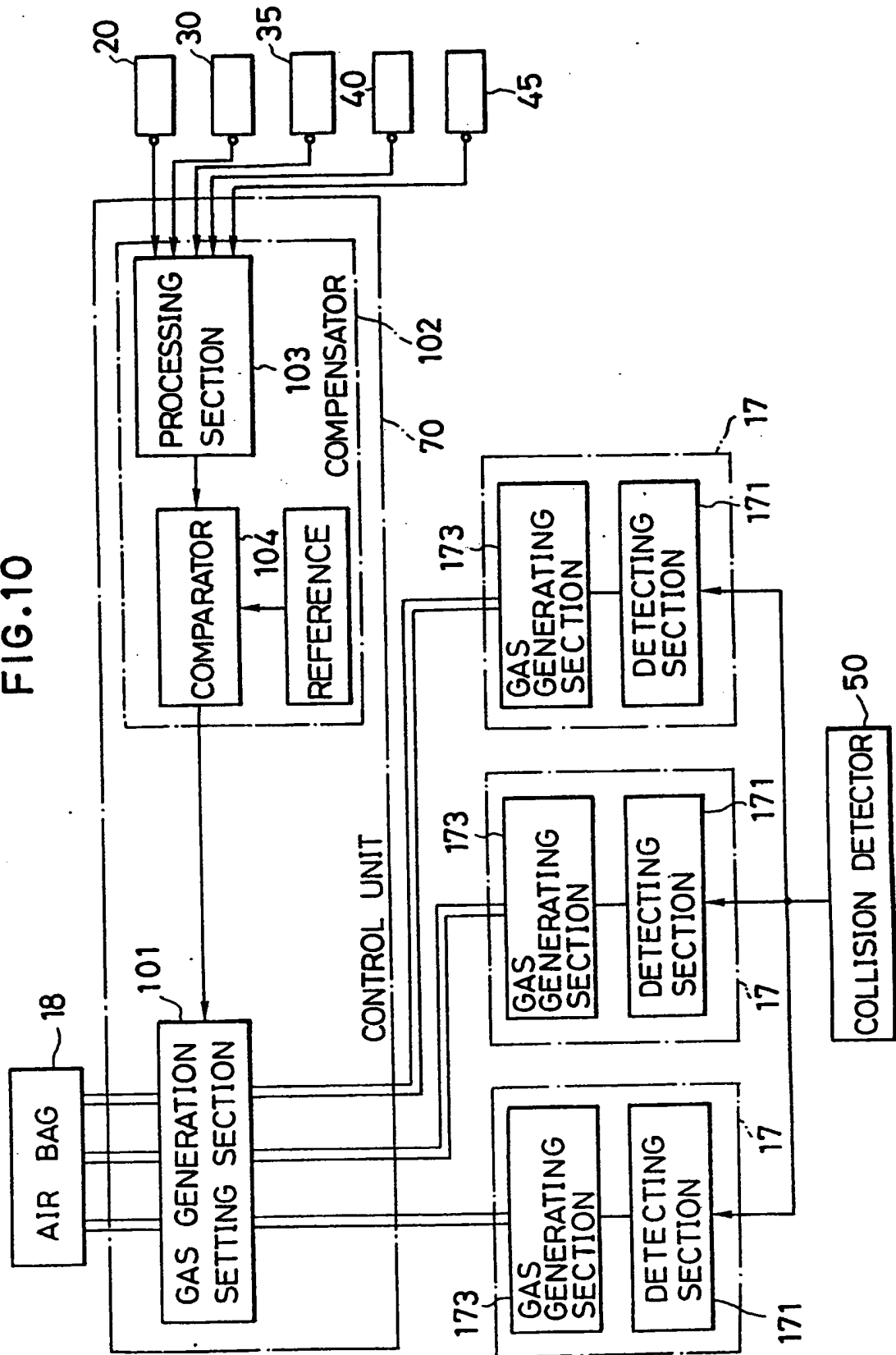


FIG. 11

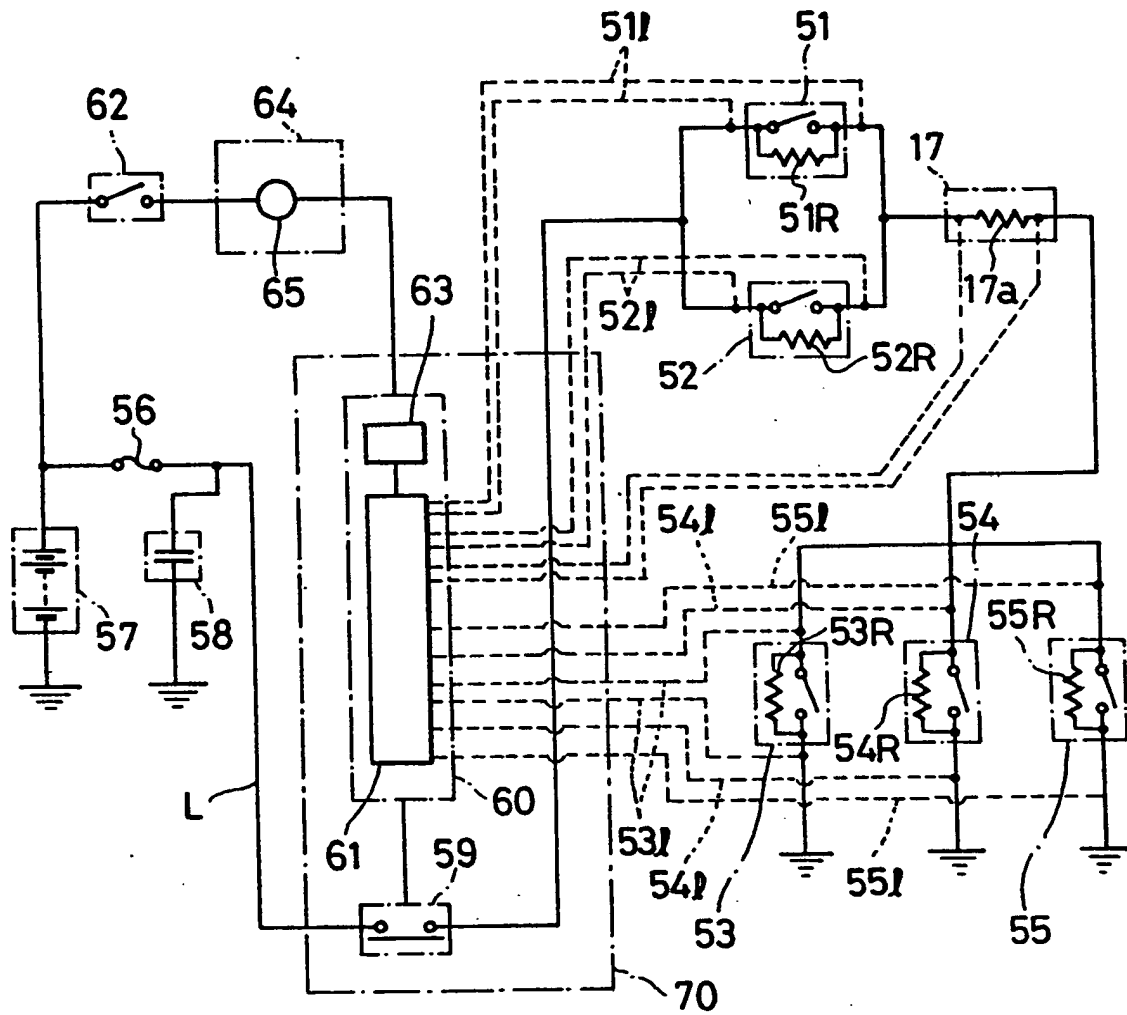


FIG.12

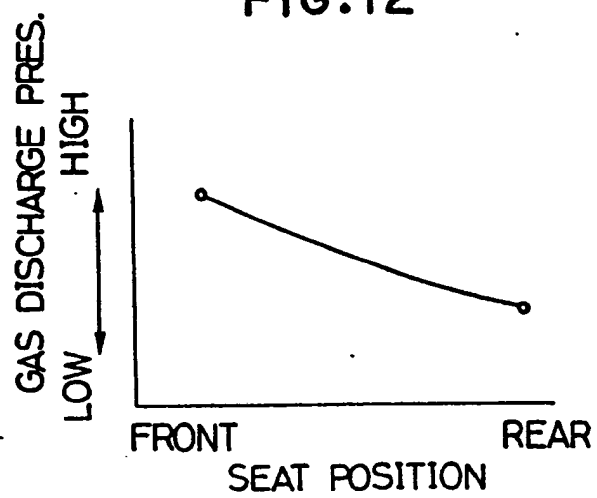


FIG.13

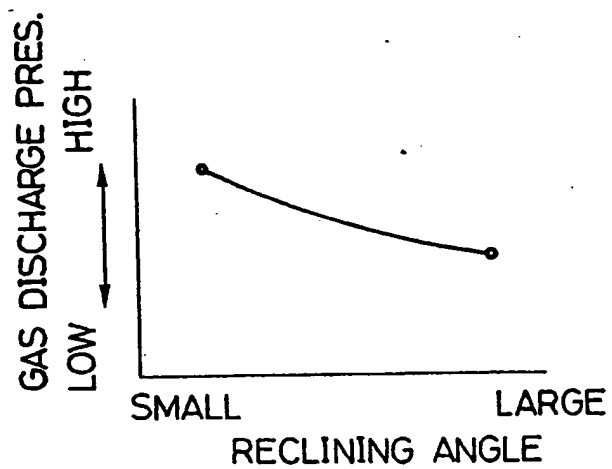


FIG.14

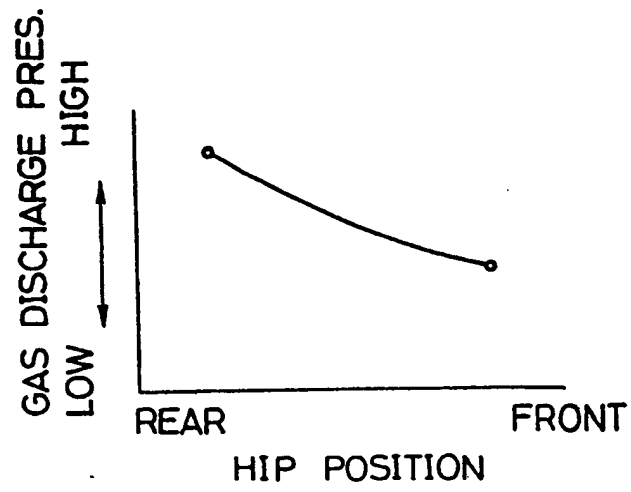


FIG.15

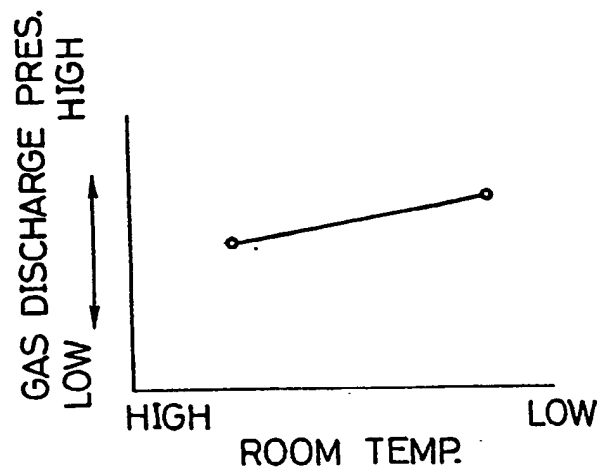


FIG.16

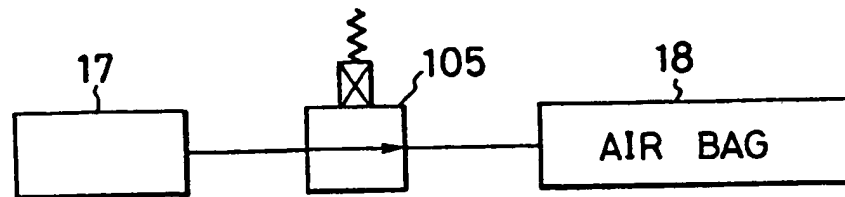


FIG.17

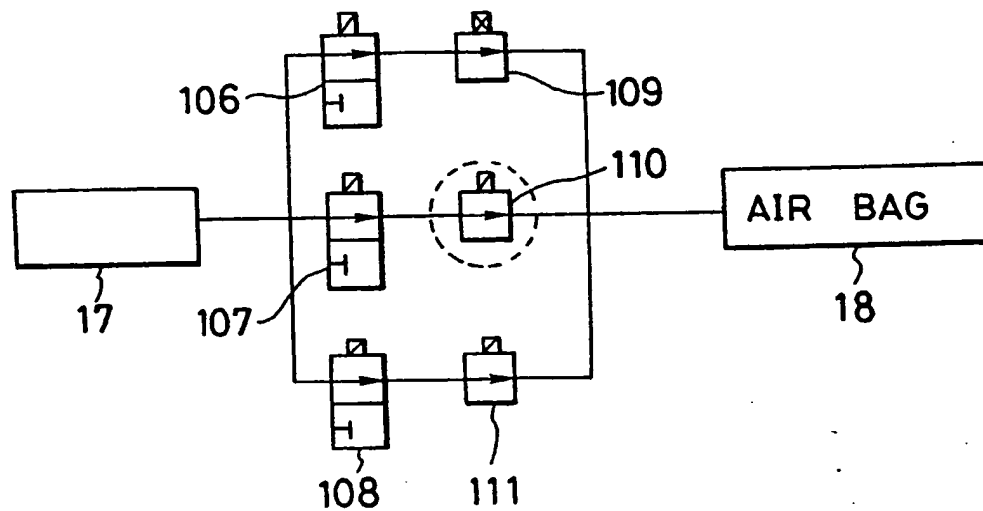


FIG. 18

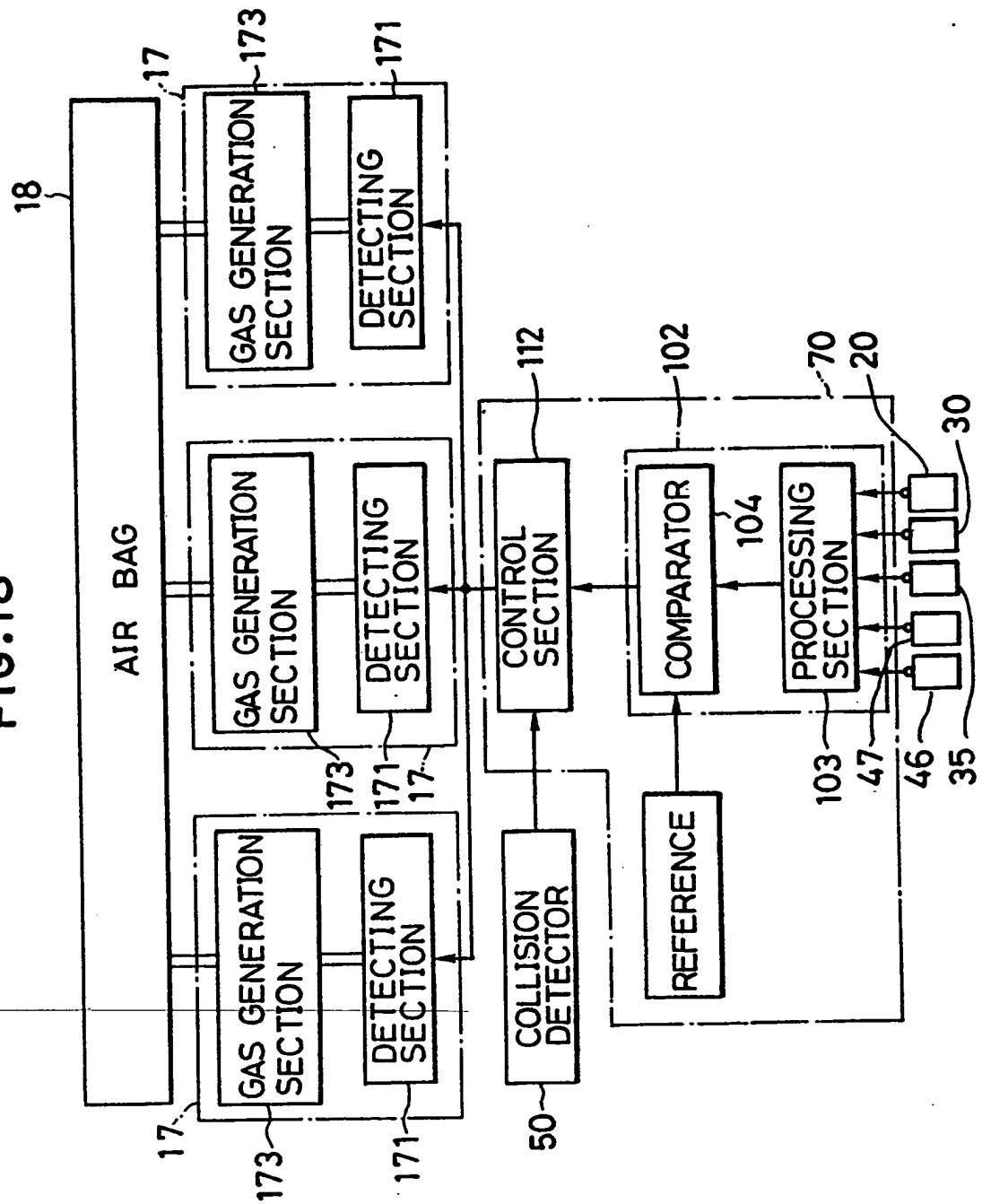


FIG.19

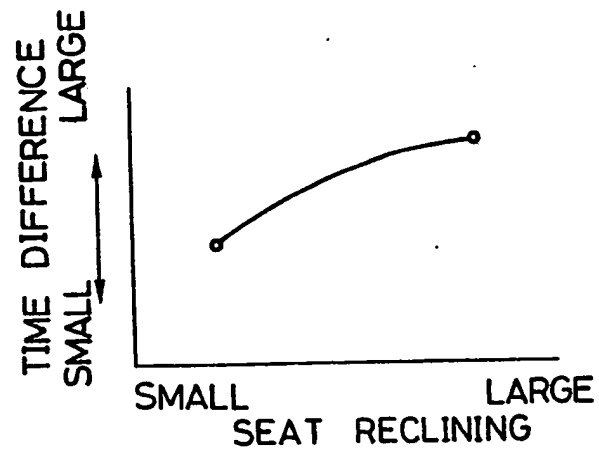


FIG.20

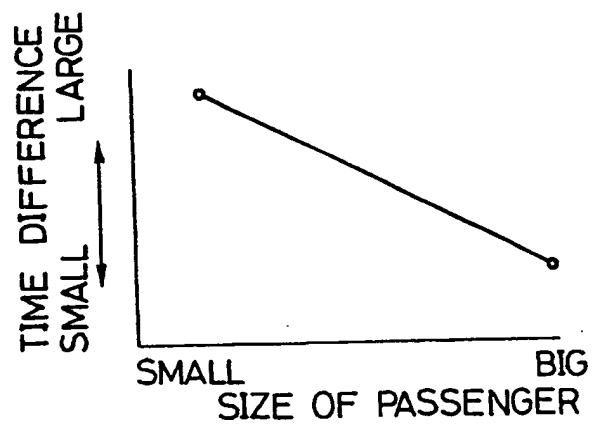


FIG.21

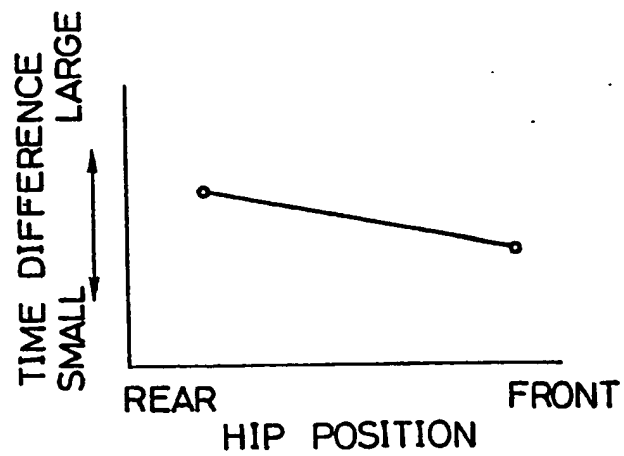


FIG.22

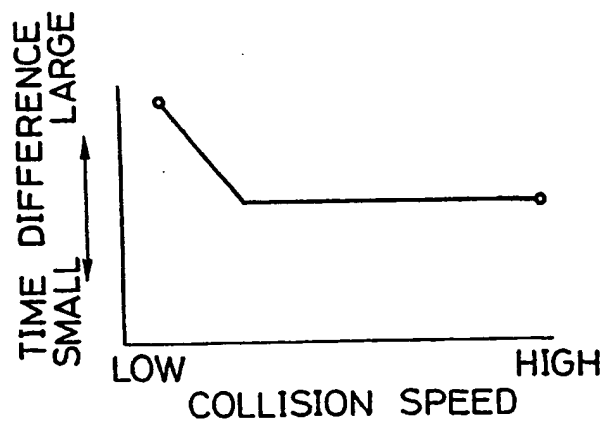


FIG. 23

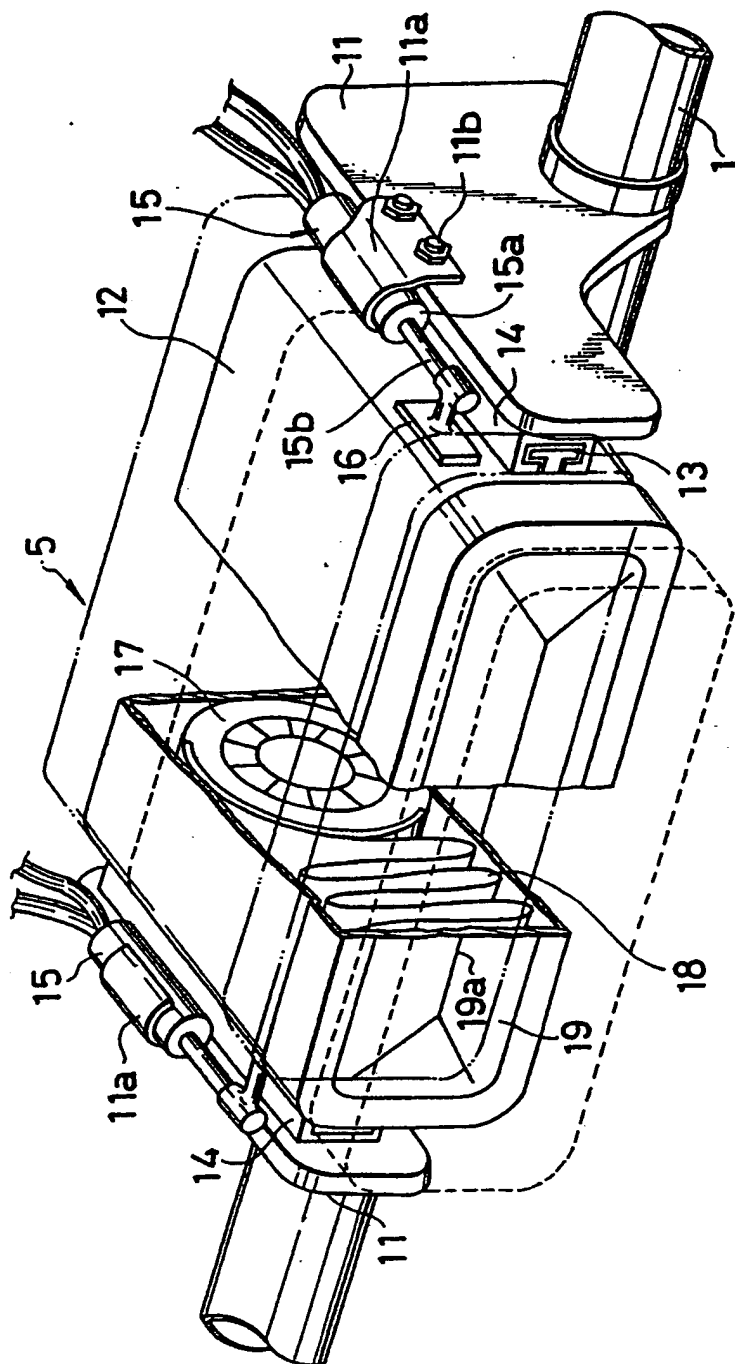


FIG.24

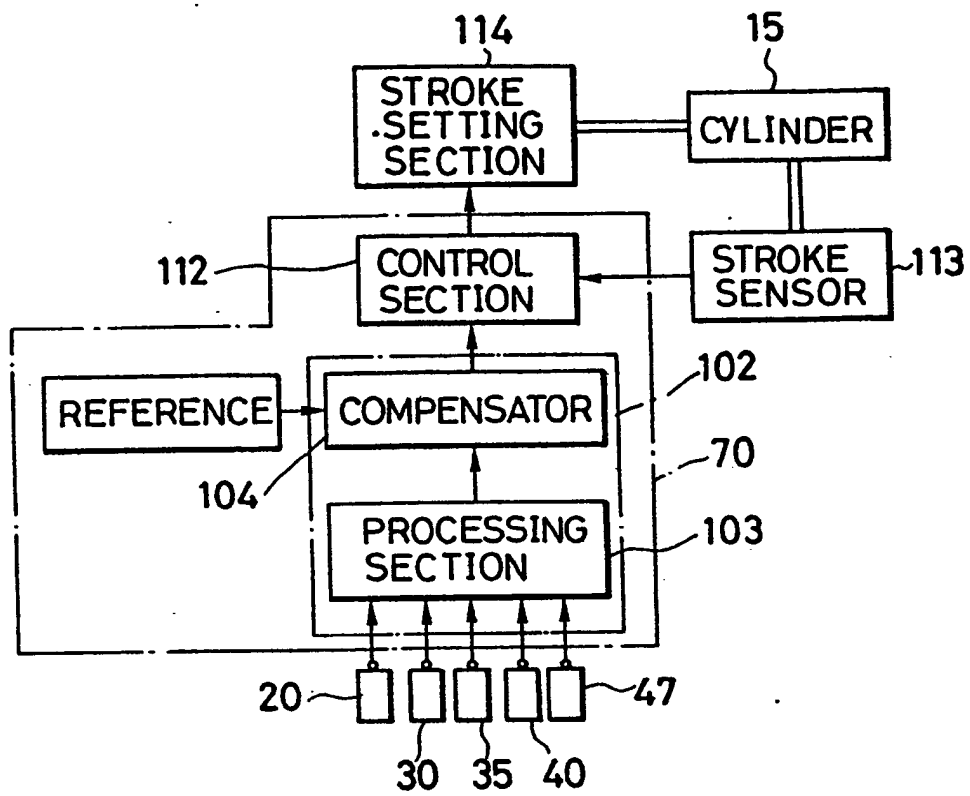


FIG.25

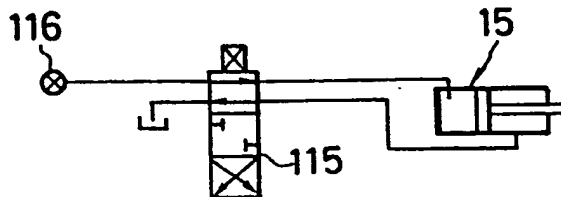


FIG.26

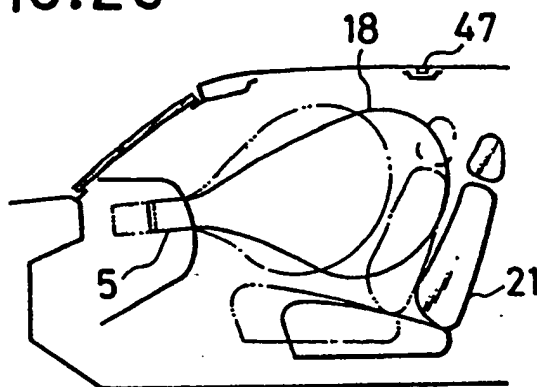


FIG.28

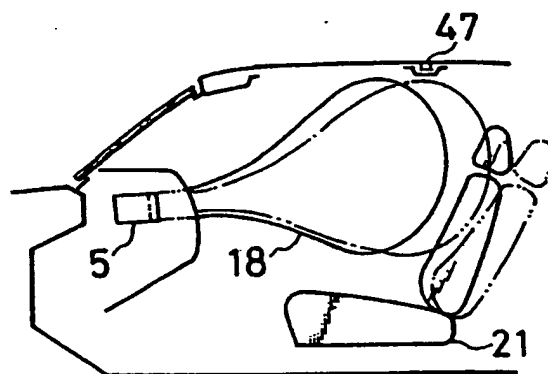
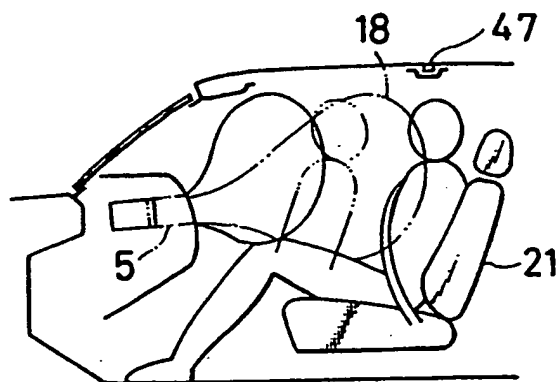


FIG.30



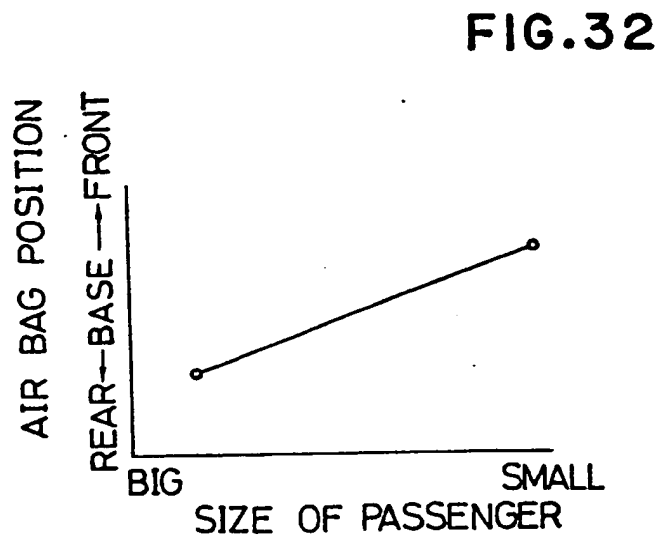
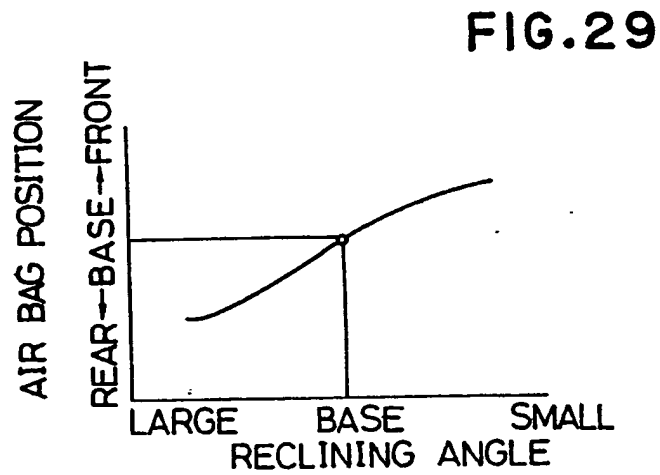
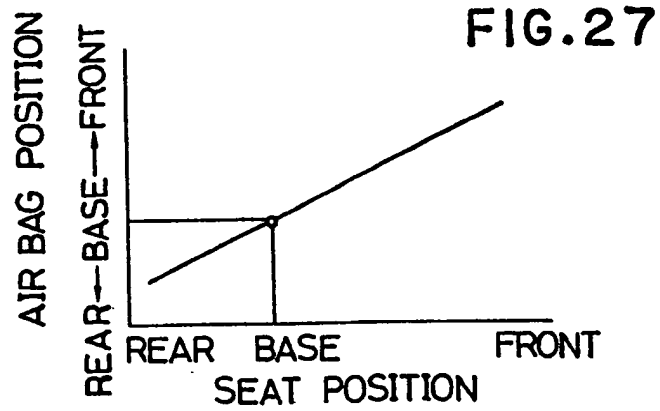


FIG.31

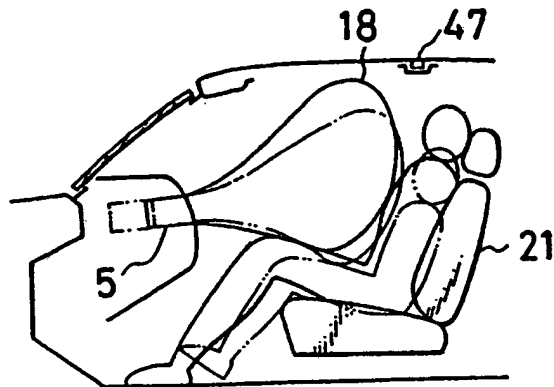


FIG.33

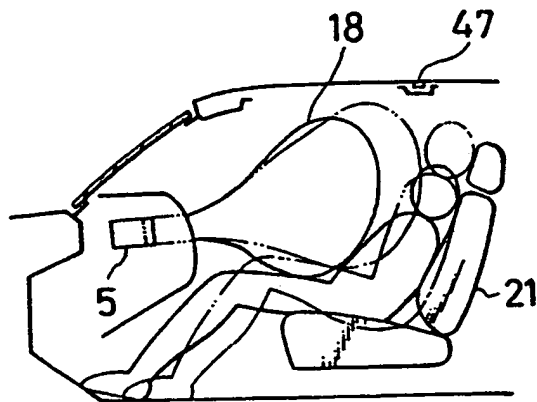


FIG.34

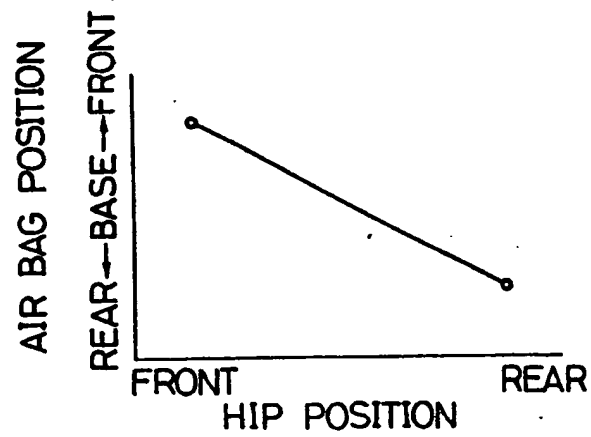


FIG.35

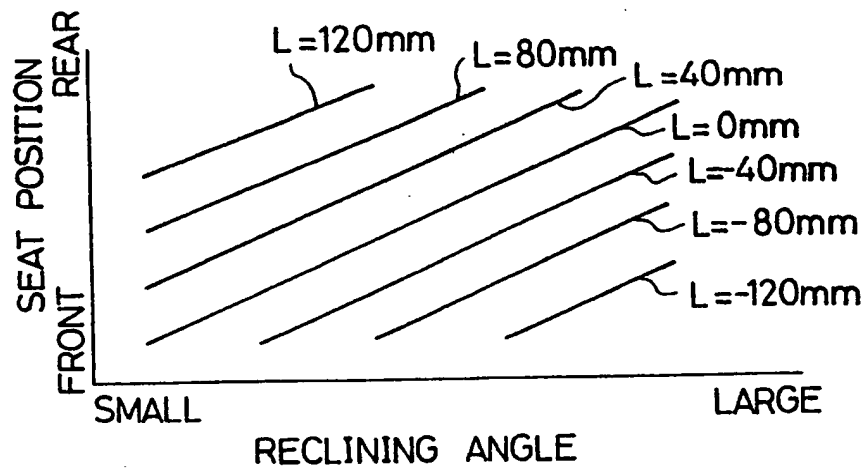


FIG. 36

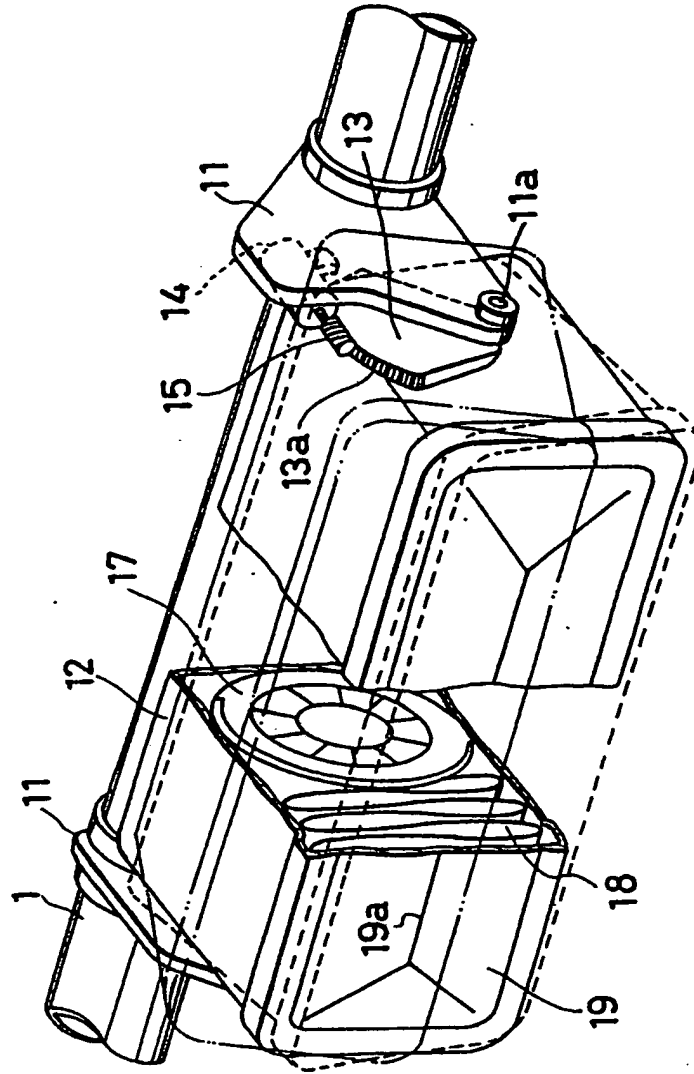


FIG. 37

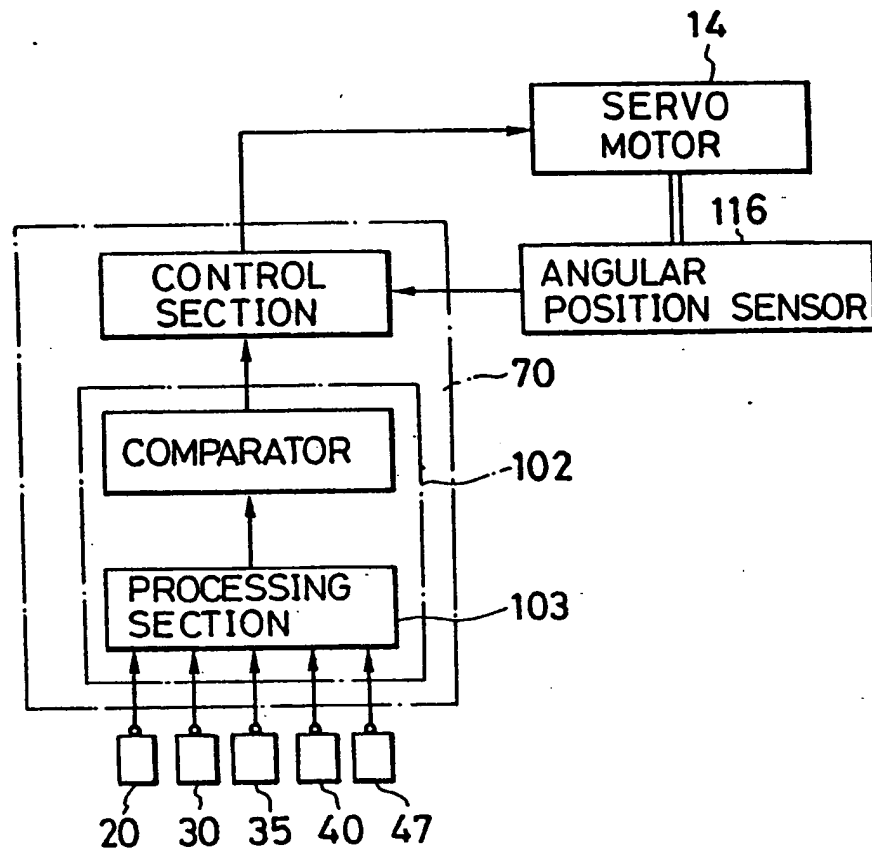


FIG.38

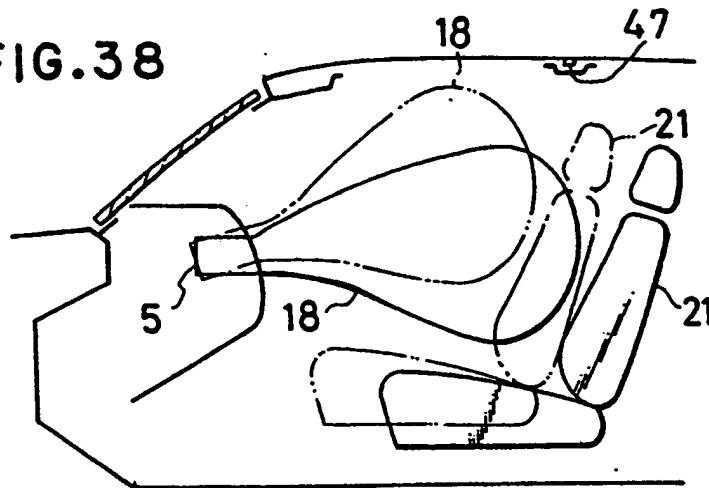


FIG.40

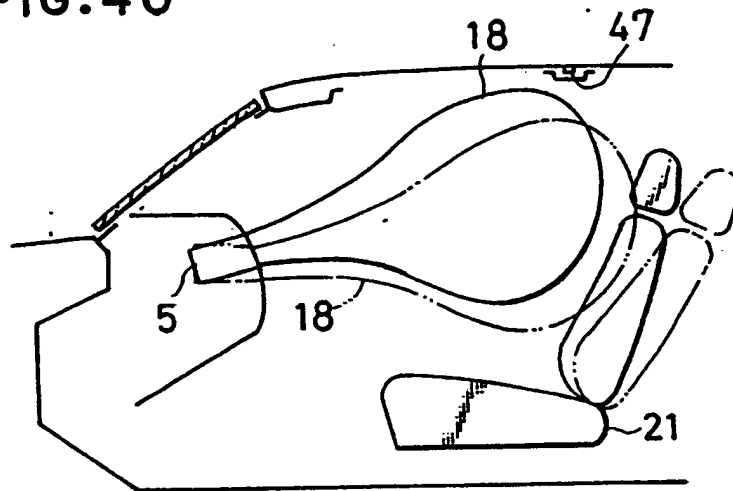


FIG.42

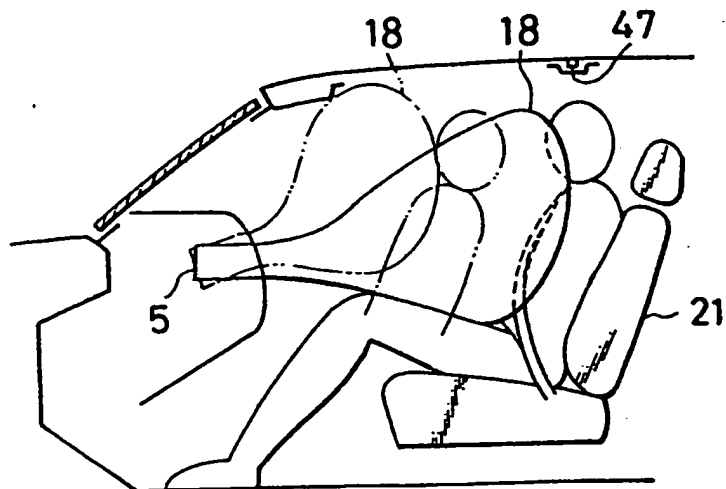


FIG.39

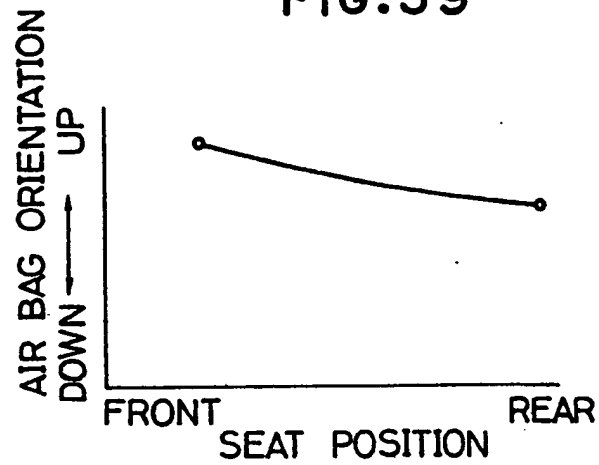


FIG.41

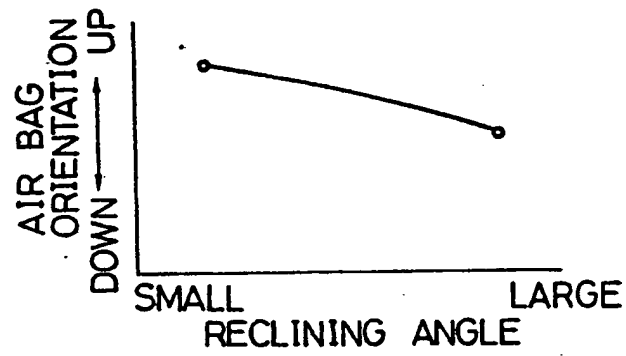


FIG.44

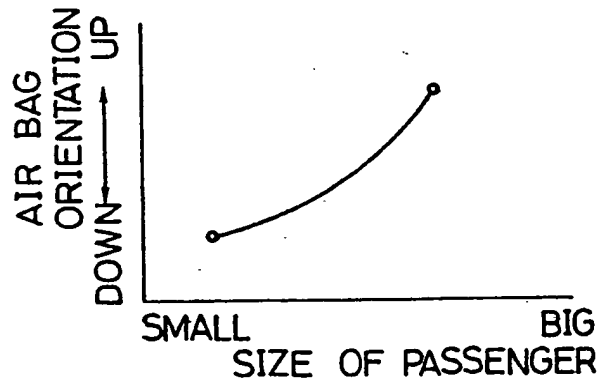


FIG. 43

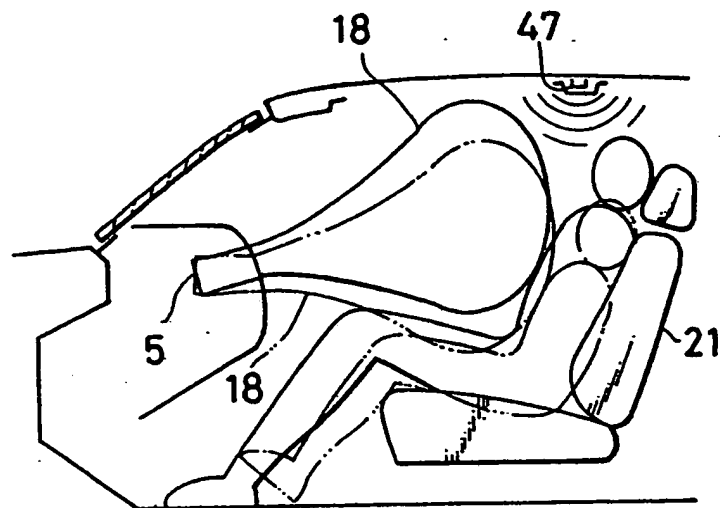


FIG. 45

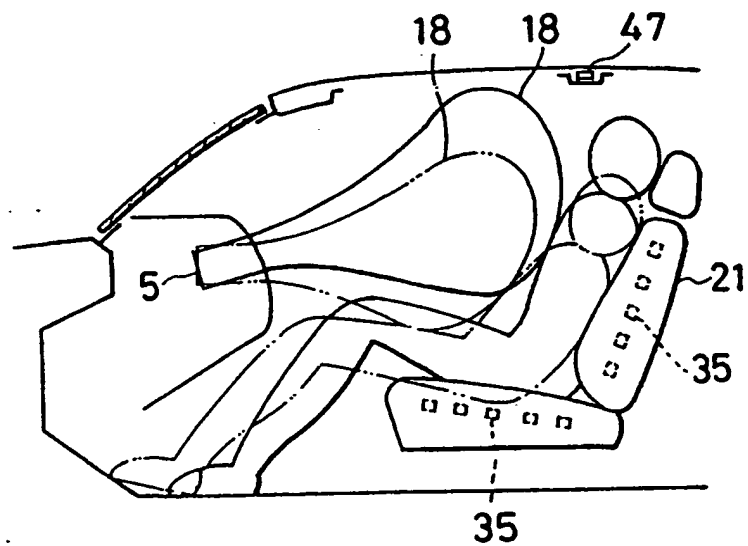


FIG.46

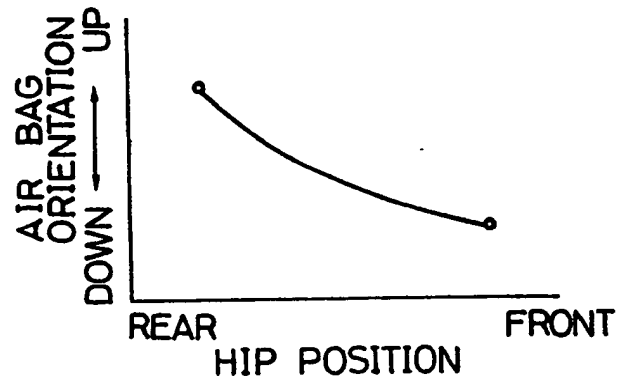


FIG.47

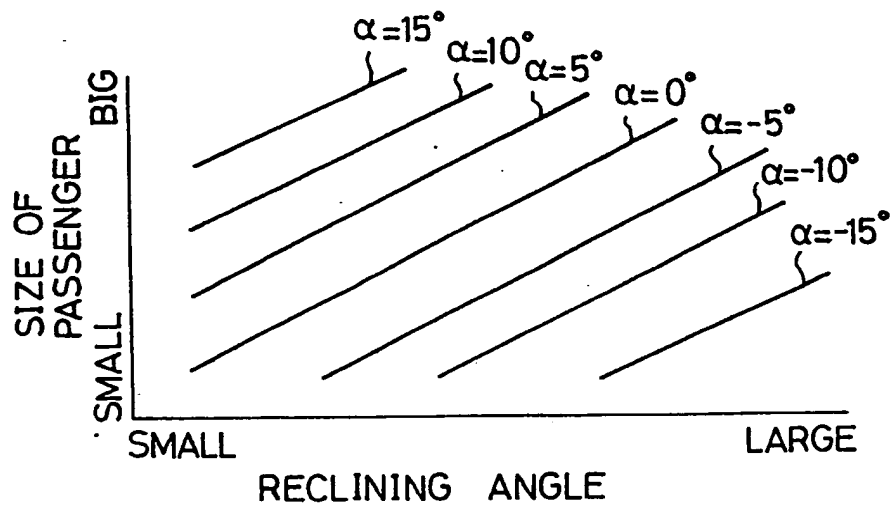


FIG.48

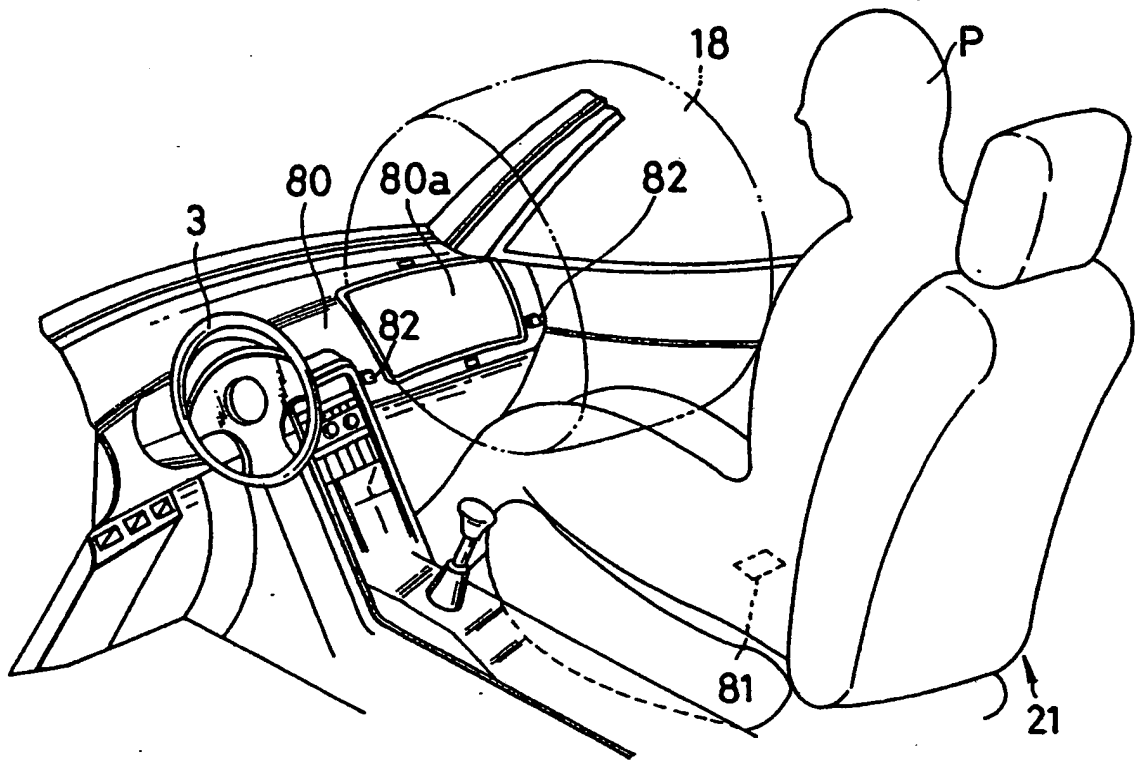


FIG.49

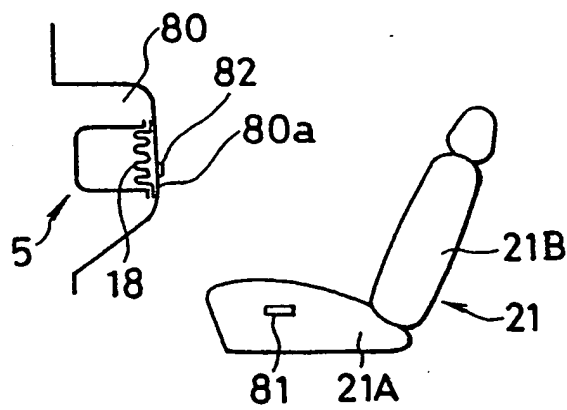


FIG. 50

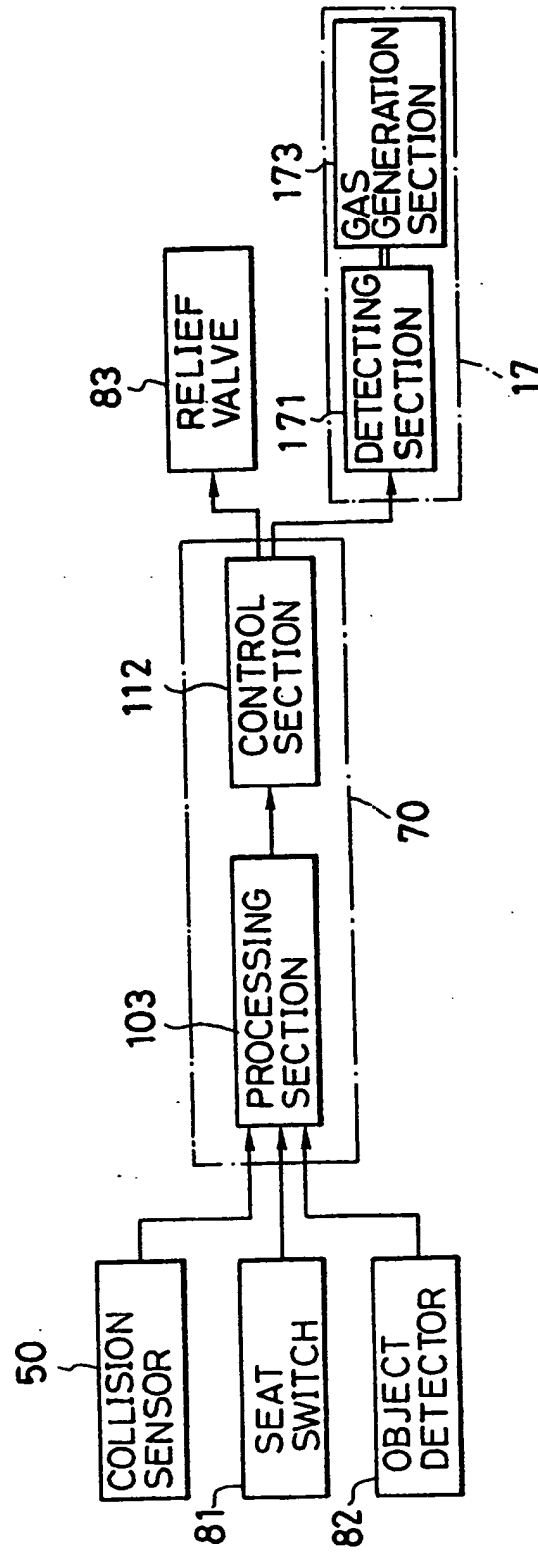


FIG.51

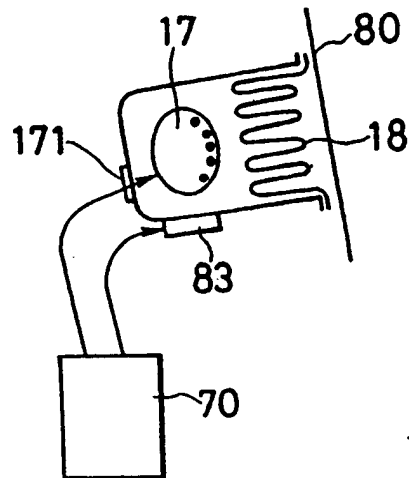


FIG.52

SITUATION	SEAT SWITCH	OBJECT DETECTOR	RELIEF VALUE
1	ON	ON	OPEN
2	ON	OFF	CLOSE
3	OFF	ON	OPEN
4	OFF	OFF	NO INFLATION



DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl.5)
X	GB-A-1 467 769 (NISSAN) * Whole document *	1,20	B 60 R 21/22 B 60 R 21/26
A	---	4	
X	DE-C-3 413 768 (DAIMLER-BENZ) * Figure 1; column 2 - column 3, line 40 *	1,5	
A	---	8,13	
Y	US-A-3 703 300 (GILLUND) * Column 1, lines 1-45; column 7, line 62 - column 8, line 3 *	21-23	
Y	US-A-3 884 497 (MASSENGILL) * Figure 1; column 3, line 31 - column 4, line 7 *	21-23	
X	US-A-3 767 228 (LEWIS) * Column 2, line 15 - column 4, line 15; column 11, lines 24-50 *	24,25	
A	DE-A-2 628 815 (VOLKSWAGENWERK) * Figure 1; page 6, line 29 - page 9 *	1,2,5,7 14,15, 34,35, 39	TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int. Cl.5) B 60 R
A	DE-A-2 153 601 (ROCKET RESEARCH CORP.) * Page 4, line 21 - page 5, line 12 *	1,4,6,8 -12	
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 13-11-1989	Examiner DUBOIS B.F.J.
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document			